Booklist's

Guide to Graphic Novels in Libraries, 2025

Collection Development

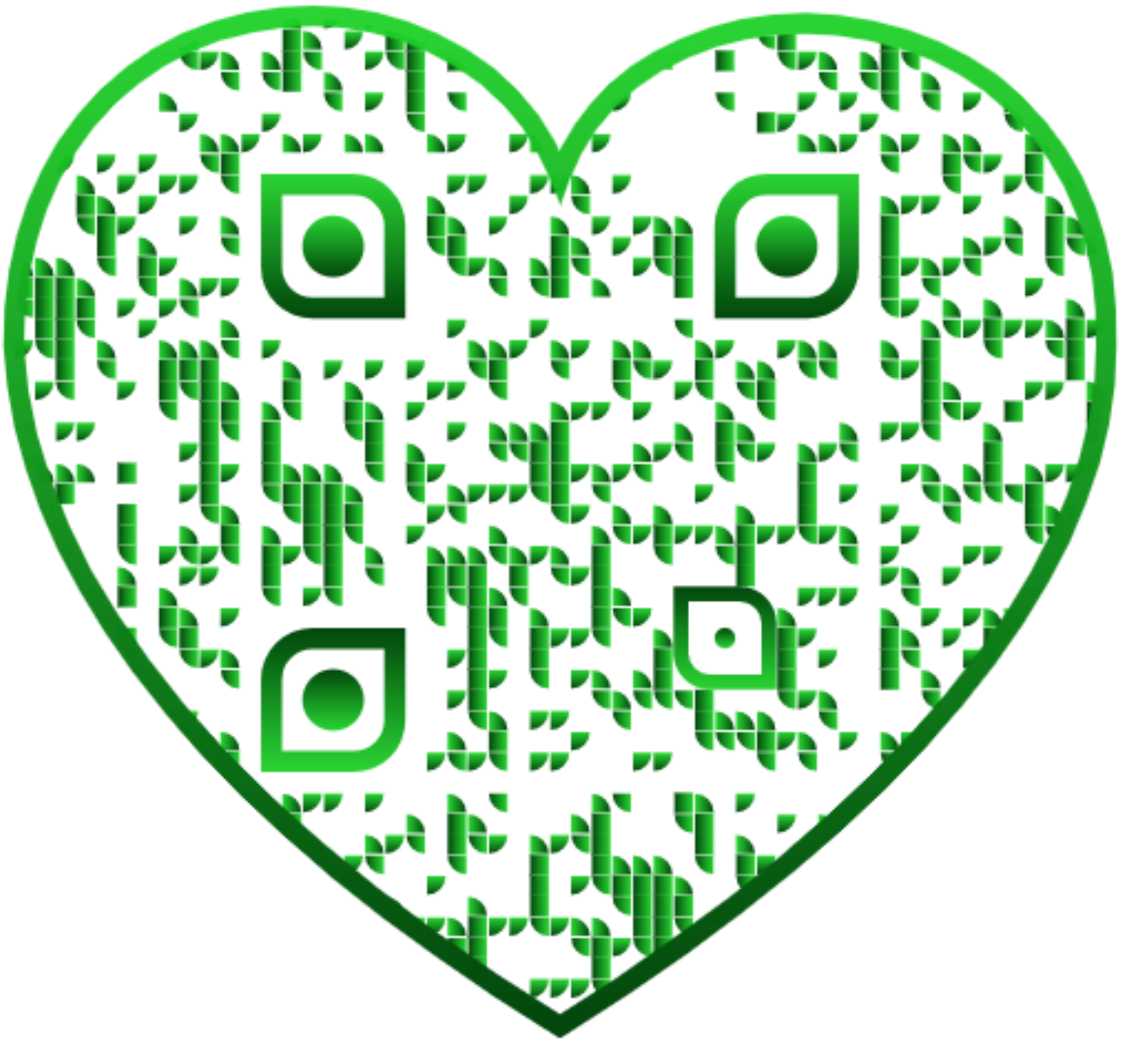
Readers' Advisory

Programming

Original Comics from Jose Pimienta and Hamish Steele

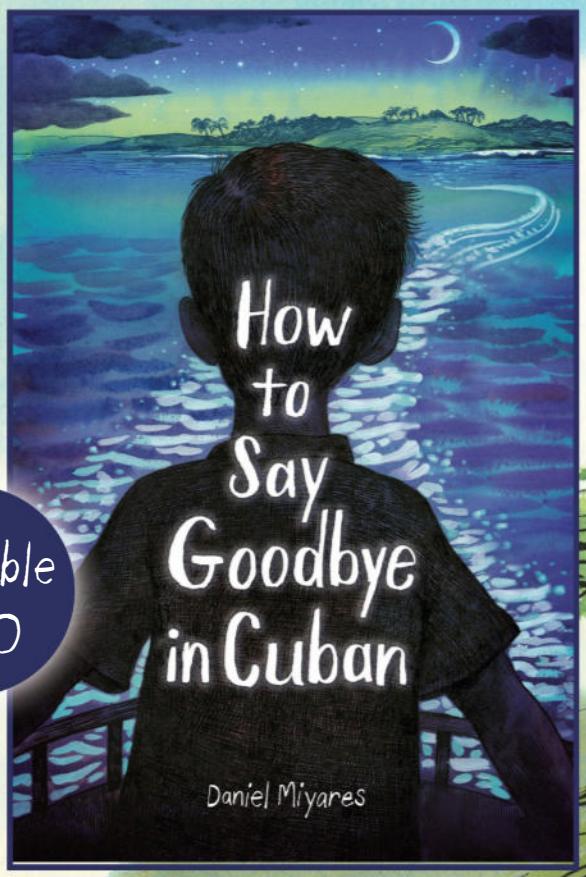
Cover art from *I Wish I Didn't Have to Tell You This*, written and illustrated by Eugene Yelchin

ALA American Library Association



A RIVETING COMING-OF-AGE GRAPHIC MEMOIR

This is the true story of 12-year-old Carlos and his family's quest for freedom, based on the author's father's childhood.



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Booklist's

Guide to Graphic Novels in Libraries, 2025

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From the Editor

It's been a standard feature of this publication to have at least one article about the banning and/or censorship of comics, graphic novels, and manga in libraries, and that's true this year too. But as I'm sure you know all too well, the pressure on libraries has expanded beyond just what's on the shelves; library workers face incredible strain as the fundamental principles undergirding librarianship come under attack, not to mention the devastating impact of losing essential funding. It's overwhelming to be sure, but I heartily echo GNCRT President Shira Pilarski's sentiments from their column: "I know we can build communities, use our platforms to advocate for those that need it, and find joy in any ways we can." I can find no better distillation of the importance of library work than building community, advocacy, and joy, three elements we've made sure to cover in varied ways in this year's issue. For building community, Cassy Lee's article about a zine program for library workers offers tips on finding a creative, collective outlet for dealing with the demands of the job. For advocating for communities who need strong voices, Brenda Lower addresses the importance of cultivating dynamic, diverse collections and ways to push past self-censorship. And as for joy, what could be better than a robust list of cat manga? I hope these pages offer you new or surprising ways to integrate community, advocacy, and joy into your library days.

—Sarah Hunter
Books for Youth and Graphic Novels
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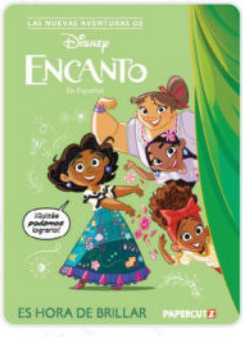
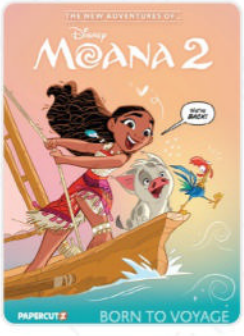
PAPERCUTZ



The hit series is now available in a Spanish language edition!

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF: ENCANTO #1
(SPANISH)

ISBN: 9781545818503
By: Amparo Ortiz & Andrea Greppi
On Sale: June 5, 2025



Friendship is an adventure!

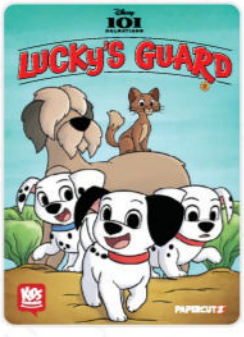
THE NEW ADVENTURES OF: MOANA 2 VOL. 1

ISBN: 9781545818527
By: Sloane Leong & Andrea Greppi
On Sale: July 15, 2025

Big adventure leads to new friends...

KIDS COMICS: FROZEN – DARING RESCUES

ISBN: 9781545815519
By: Katie Cook & Izel Tamayo
Available Now



Dalmatians Lucky, Rolly, and Penny train to become their most heroic selves!

KIDS COMICS: 101 DALMATIANS: LUCKY'S GUARD

ISBN: 9781545816929
By: Arianna Irwin, Sil Brys, Agnes Garbowska
On Sale: September 16, 2025

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State of Comics Librarianship

By Shira Pilarski

As I look over the State of Comics Librarianship articles from my GNCRT President predecessors, I am struck by two things: Firstly, we who work with comics and libraries continue to grapple, year after year, with the ongoing efforts to censor and ban comics, undermine our work, defund and diminish libraries, and in some cases, even criminalize library workers for merely doing their jobs. Secondly, we continue to find joy in our work, uplift and advocate for comics and their creators, and, perhaps most significantly, build strong communities around comics librarianship.

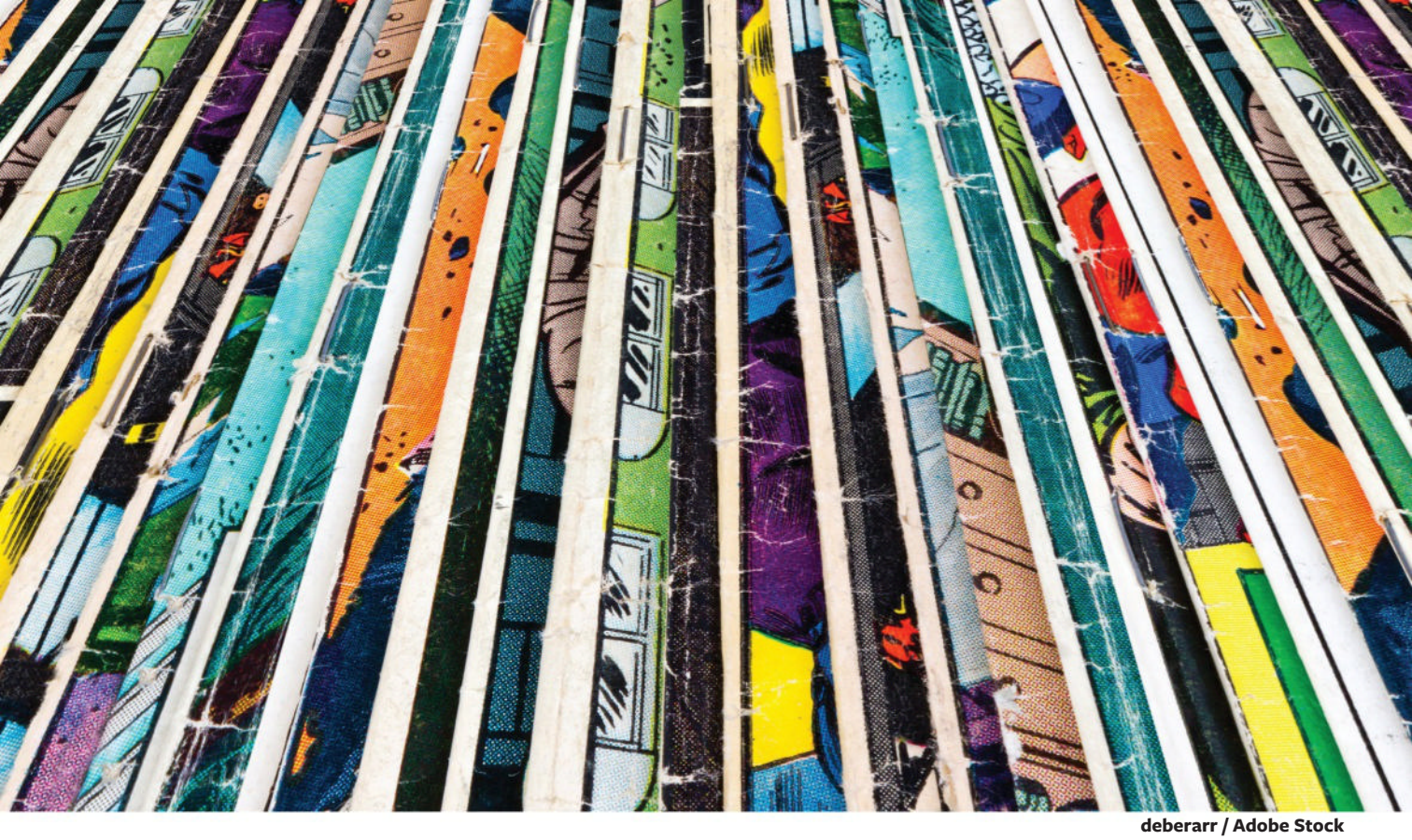
The GNCRT directly fosters some of these communities. Our Discord, moderated by the GNCRT Communications Committee, is a vibrant hub where those new to comics librarianship can ask questions of experts and receive advice in a friendly, informal setting and where comics creators can amplify their work in a welcoming environment. The GNCRT Programming Committee's LibComix Online team creates interactive and exciting virtual programs, inspiring library workers to bring comics programming and collection development into their daily work. Each year, the GNCRT Conference Committee crafts a schedule of networking opportunities and educational sessions for comics library workers at all levels who are attending the ALA Annual Conference. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, the GNCRT actively participated in the 2025 Chicago Comic & Entertainment Expo (C2E2), carving out a space for comics in libraries in a fan-convention setting and hopefully signaling a future of collaboration with fan cons around the country.

School libraries are some of the most targeted in book bans. In its *Beyond the Shelves* report, PEN America recorded 10,046 instances of book bans during the 2023–24 school year, a record high. For those experiencing—or preparing for—comics challenges, the GNCRT Addressing Censorship Committee's "Addressing Comics Challenges Toolkit" provides wonderful resources and tips. Additionally, the Committee's Community Zine Project, available in a digital archive on the GNCRT website, provides printable zines featuring tips, anecdotes, and solidarity around comics censorship. For the first time, this year's GNCRT Comics Librarian Travel Grant is offering a scholarship designated for a school librarian. That scholarship, provided by Oni Press, joins Skybound Entertainment's scholarship, enabling two library workers to attend the 2025 ALA Annual Conference in Philadelphia. Between the Travel Grant and the Will Eisner Graphic Novel Grants for Librarians, the GNCRT administers the delivery of $14,000 to deserving libraries and their workers.

I could continue to go on about some of the other wonderful initiatives and resources the GNCRT works on and provides, such as our Best Graphic Novels reading lists for adults and children, our recent collaboration core list with REFORMA, or our upcoming collaboration core list with the Rainbow Round Table, and our Metadata & Cataloging Committee's tireless work updating Wikidata comics-related items. But for me, perhaps the most exciting piece of GNCRT news (and, really, comics-in-libraries news in general) is the creation of the GNCRT Outstanding Comics Awards. The inaugural Awards will be announced in early 2026 and will honor winners in *nine* categories: Fiction, Nonfiction, and Series in each of the age categories of Children's, Young Adult, and Adult. While comics industry awards already exist, the GNCRT Outstanding Comics Awards fill a unique need: selecting the best in graphic literature specifically with a library audience in mind.

I would love to live in a world where libraries are not under attack, where important federal organizations that support libraries and cultural institutions are not being defunded and dismantled, and where it is not challenging and scary to do the work we do. But this is the world we live in. Still, I know we can build communities, use our platforms to advocate for those that need it, and find joy in any ways we can. First, take care of yourselves and those around you. And when you have the capacity to get involved? The GNCRT would love to have you.

Shira Pilarski is the Humanities Librarian at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, their first academic library role after over a decade in public libraries. The current President of GNCRT, they have chaired GNCRT, RRT, and YALSA committees, as well as serving on the RRT Executive Board. When Shira is not screaming into the void about queer comics, they can be found snuggling all the cats, playing drums in cheesy rock bands, or listening to audiobooks at 1.8 speed while completing color gradient jigsaw puzzles.



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Readers' Advisory for Readers New to Comics

By Robin Brenner

Those of us working with comics in libraries relish the invitation to introduce a new reader to our favorite format. While it can be tempting to recommend our personal top picks, it's vital to keep the readers' preferences firmly in mind. Enthusiasm is contagious, but the context for why a reader is reaching out to try comics and what their own personal tastes or barriers to the format might be, should be your guide.

Ask why!

Ask the reader why they're looking for comics now. Is a friend or family member a comics fan, and they want to understand the appeal? Are they a parent struggling to understand why their kid will only read *Dog Man*? Is it because they've seen a film or TV show based on a comic? Has their book club selected a graphic novel, and they want to try more? For all of these answers, your recommendations will be different.

Relieve the pressure

Often, a new reader is trying to understand comics to connect with someone, and they may feel pressure to love the format as much as their fan does. Reassure them that no one is required to become a lifelong comics fan in order to see the appeal of the way comics work. Remind them that while comics are a different way of telling a story, readers can read and learn at their own pace and with their own tastes to see what makes comics compelling.

Assess their visual literacy chops

Ask them what kinds of comics they might have read before, if any. A comic strip? Comic book? An

award-winning graphic novel for a class or book club? The process of reading comics, especially longer narratives, involves slowing down to examine pictures, making connections across panels, and examining layouts. New comics readers may not fully understand how complex reading comics can be until they do it themselves. Comics deploy dialogue, motion lines, sound effects, panels, page-turns, and colors to tell stories, but it takes time to get used to parsing those signals. There is no one right way to read a comic; explain that they should read (and reread) in whatever order makes sense to their brain.

What do they enjoy?

Readers new to comics may think they have to start with what their friends or family love or with noted classics. But it's important to steer them toward a genre or type they will connect with—nothing is worse than trying a new type of storytelling, only to be confused, bored, or put off because they don't like the content no matter how it's told. If the reader prefers memoir, history, or science, make sure the comics you offer them include those topics. If they read every cozy mystery or Regency romance they can find, give them those in comics form. Readers are much more likely to embrace the format shift if they're getting a story they are primed to love.

Start with words and structure

While comics are at least 50 percent images, words and dialogue are where new comics readers will be most comfortable. Appealing writing for that individual can make or break a recommendation. Writing is most evident in the kind of dialogue they prefer, from witty banter to rapid-fire sniping, but also note language and form. Is lush, dense prose their go-to? Do they tend toward experimental structure or more straightforward storytelling? Do they like rapidly unfolding plots or slower meditations? Do they enjoy in-depth world building, or do they just want to get to the action? Their preferences can help you figure out what titles might fit their sensibility, even if the structure or plotting comes from the combination of writing and images instead of just from the writing style.

Don't forget the pictures

Ask what kinds of art, movies, TV, and video games they enjoy. Many people can describe what they like visually, using cinematic terms such as editing, cuts, or production design. Do they like vibrant color and dynamic visuals, or do they prefer muted tones? Do they like to put together a scene like a puzzle, or do they want a direct procession of images? Do they like slow pacing or quick edits between scenes? Show them some page spreads as examples, and see what they gravitate toward. New readers may find simpler art more appealing to begin with as they learn the visual language of comics, but others may engage immediately with complicated layouts and artistic details that pull them into the story.

Media-inspired curiosity

Source material titles can be engaging, though they may not share a style or sensibility with the media adaptation. Sometimes there's a direct line: avid viewers of Netflix's *Heartstopper* will likely vibe with Alice Oseman's Heartstopper graphic novels and webcomic. Most comics, though, contribute limited elements—whether it be style, a particular plot point, or characters—to any adaptation. Investigate what the creators drew their inspirations from (Wikipedia and showrunner interviews are your friend). If dialogue is key for this fan, seek out writers known for similar patter. If it's action, consider artists

From *Family Style: Memories of an American from Vietnam*, written and drawn by Thien Pham.

that excel at showing dynamic movement. If they like a character, investigate the best starting point that's currently in print. This is sometimes complicated, especially in superhero comics, but comics journalists and library workers love making lists of titles to recommend where to start, so lean on their expertise.

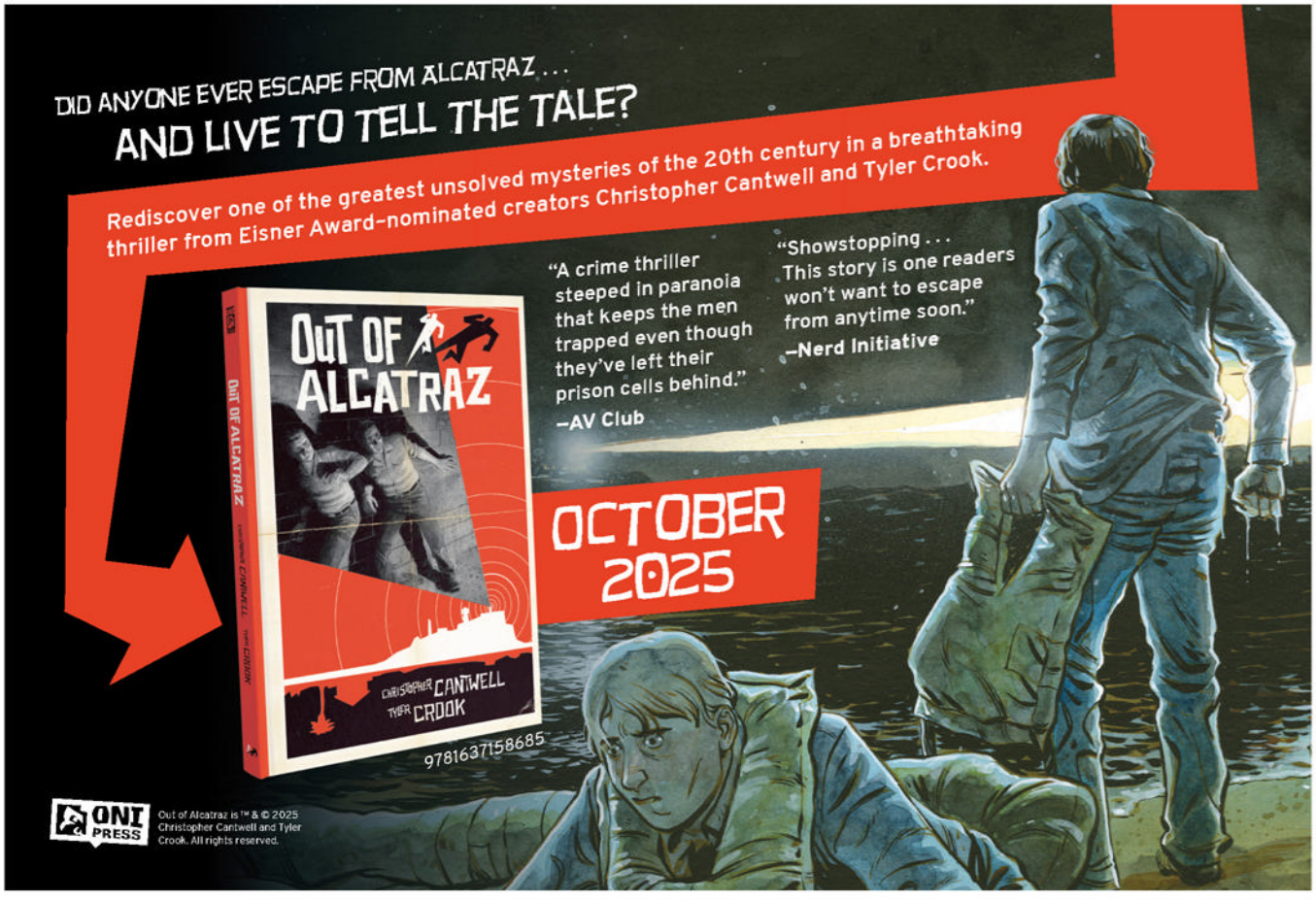
Travel the world with comics

The learning process for comics restarts when venturing into a new comics culture, such as Japanese manga or French-language bande dessinée (BD). Get a sense of what the person is curious about within that comics tradition. If they haven't read any comics at all before, try to locate a title that is accessible to a reader new to both the format and the cultural references. For example, with manga, avoid titles that are dense with elements like exaggerated expressions, super-deformed characters, and fractured panels. While these are beloved by manga fans, they can be baffling for the beginner. Instead, look for a title that gives the reader time to adjust. Naoki Urusawa's *Pluto* exemplifies the best in manga storytelling but is less hectically paced and less exaggerated in character design than your typical shonen action comedy. Fumi Yoshinaga's *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* offers a well-observed slice-of-life story with a lot of space in the layout and character interactions that can make it easier for a new reader to engage.

Track what works and what doesn't

If you are able to, check back in with your new reader about what worked for them and, even more importantly, what didn't. Make sure readers know you won't be upset or offended if they don't like something you suggested. Learning about why they didn't like something will help make your next recommendation better. Invite the reader to an ongoing consultation if they would like, and make sure they know you're available to keep trying when they want more or different titles.

Robin Brenner is the Head of Reference and Programming at the Woburn Public Library (MA). She is the Past-President of the ALA's Graphic Novels and Comics Round Table (GNCRT) and has served on the Michael L. Printz Award, Margaret A. Edwards Award and the Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards. She is the editor-in-chief of the comics review website *No Flying No Tights*.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TEEN SPACE
Libraries represent what a society with public access to resources and information can look like.

"Dear Librarians" by Jose Pimienta (Author/illustrator of "Halfway to Somewhere" and other comics.)

From *The Boy from Clearwater,* by Pei-Yun Yu, art by Jian-Xin Zhou, and translated by Lin King.

Beyond a Core Collection

By Sarah Hunter

Certain graphic novels have earned icon status; they're the titles most likely to come to mind to even the most casual reader, and odds are good that they're in your graphic novel collections right now, probably with a long list of holds. Their reputations are well deserved: these are books that have won wide critical acclaim, been adapted and re-adapted into other media, and received prestigious awards.

But, of course, they're just the beginning—there's a vast sea of comics, graphic novels, and manga to explore, with options in just about every genre, subgenre, and genre blend. If you have readers who have started charting their course through comics with Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, Art Speigelman's *Maus*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, or Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, set them further down the path with these other excellent titles that explore similar themes and moods.

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic

Alison Bechdel's sharp, revealing, and lucid memoir explores her relationship with her father, her own process of coming out, and how new discoveries and realizations affect her understanding of her memories. A nonlinear timeline and wealth of literary references give her account stunning depth and meaning.

- **Heavyweight:** A Family Story of the Holocaust, Empire, and Money. By Solomon J. Brager. Art by the author. 2024. William Morrow.

  Brager embarks on a haunting and mesmerizing scavenger hunt through their family's past, as they try to dig up the facts behind family stories about surviving the Holocaust. Woven through the account of their search are ruminations on how that generational trauma came to affect the present, along with uncomfortable realizations about what it takes to survive.

- **I'm So Glad We Had This Time Together.** By Maurice Vellekoop. Art by the author. 2024. Pantheon.

  Vellekoop's coming-of-age memoir centers his personal and artistic development, beginning in his childhood in a strict Christian family, helmed by his doting mother and unpredictably violent father, and culminating in a high-level career as an illustrator. Through accounts of memories and explorations of those memories in therapy as an adult, he contemplates his complicated relationship with his parents, which became more complicated after he came out as gay.

- **My Favorite Thing Is Monsters.** By Emil Ferris. Art by the author. 2017. Fantagraphics.

  While Ferris' meticulously illustrated two-volume work is

fiction, her main character, Karen, processes her relationship with her parents and brother while trying to solve a neighborhood mystery. In the second volume, released in 2024, Karen deals with her own burgeoning homosexuality, which crystallizes in a sweet romance alongside unsettling realizations about her family. Ferris' captivating artwork, rendered entirely in ballpoint pen on lined notebook paper, is as technically impressive as Bechdel's understated realism and weaves in a wide variety of fine art and cultural references, just as Bechdel leans on literary references in *Fun Home*.

Maus

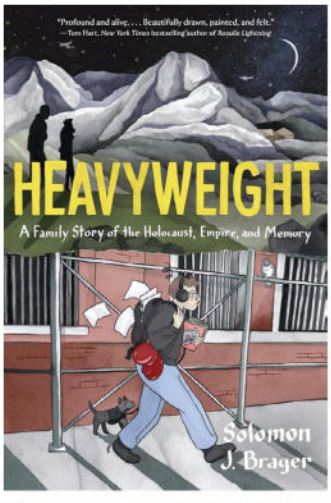
Spiegelman's account of his father's experiences during the Holocaust set the standard for literary graphic novels, and it's easy to see why: he masterfully combines the raw account of his father's memories of the horrors of the Holocaust, an art style that uses classic cartoon conventions to depict heartbreaking realities, and a compassionate but frank discussion of the effects of generational trauma into a haunting, nuanced, and profound story of how history lingers.

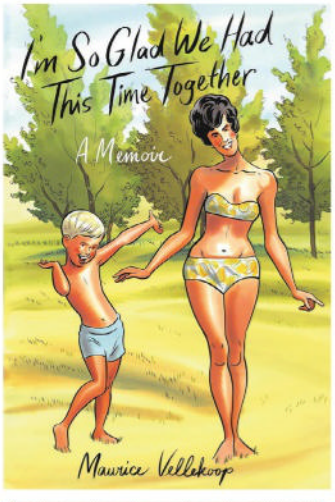
- **The Best We Could Do.** By Thi Bui. Art by the author. 2017. Abrams ComicArts.

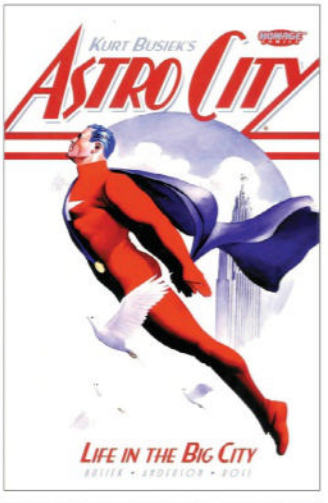
  After delivering her own child, Bui is confronted with "a wave of empathy" for her mother, and so begins this memoir and family history. Tracing her parents' history back from her childhood in California, Bui pieces together the story of their flight from Vietnam to the U.S. in 1976. Her stunning, restrained ink-and-wash artwork renders faces with portrait-like attention.

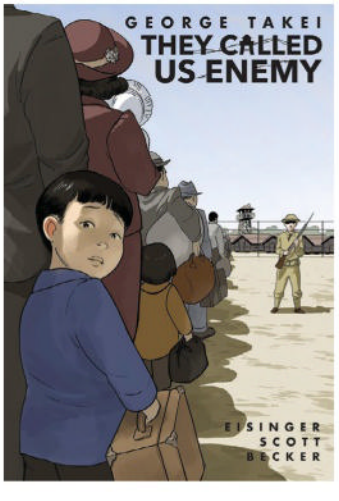
- **Feeding Ghosts.** By Tessa Hulls. Art by the author. 2024. Farrar/MCD.

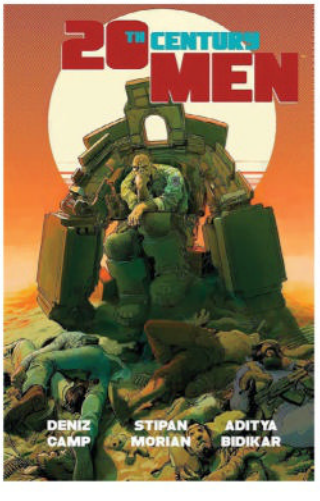
  Hulls excavates her family history of mental illness, dysfunctional bonds, inherited trauma, and cultural disconnects across three generations in this densely illustrated memoir. Her daring journalist grandmother escaped Communist China, but a breakdown and the subsequent struggle to care for her by Tessa's own mother led to a lifetime of constantly trying to run away from the inherited darkness.

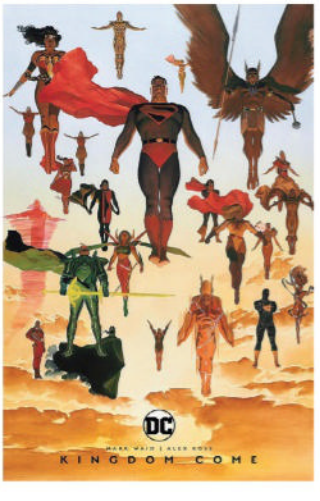


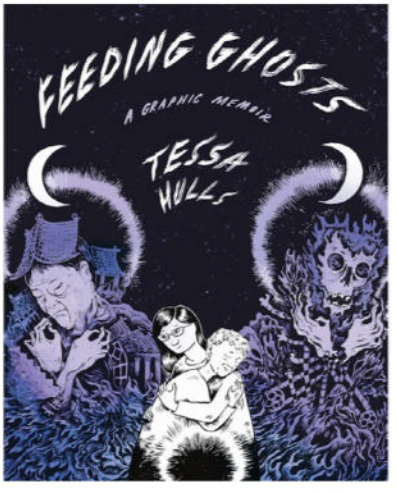


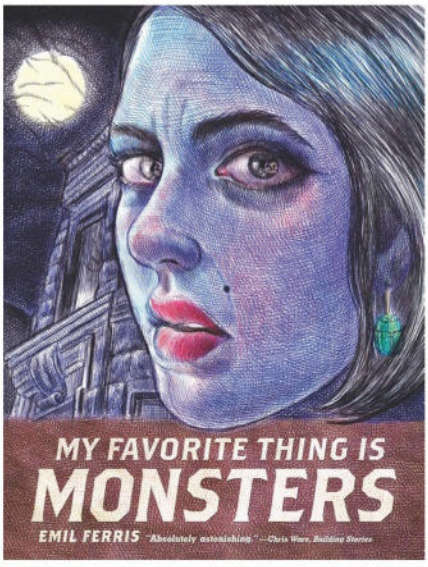


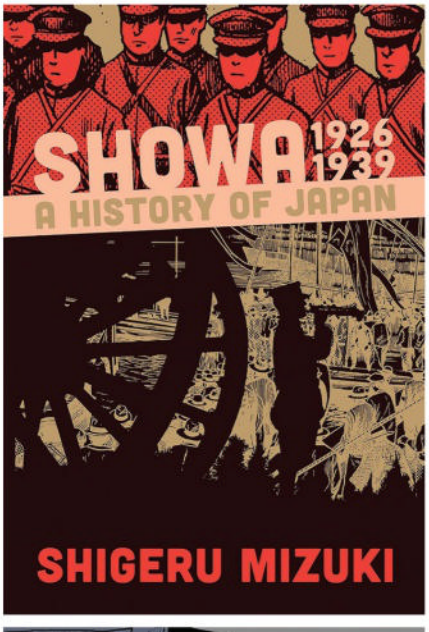


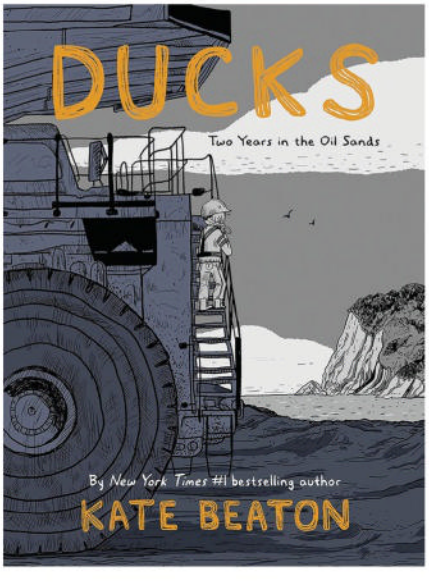












- **Showa:** A History of Japan. By Shigeru Mizuki. Art by the author. Drawn & Quarterly.

  Across four volumes, Mizuki recounts the history of his homeland, from 1926 through 1989, alongside his own experiences, from his childhood of wartime privation through his career as a best-selling mangaka. Like Spiegelman, he uses a simplified cartoon style for his characters that, especially when set against renderings of historic photos, somehow are more expressive despite their lack of strict realism.

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood & Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return

In thick, high-contrast lines and shapes, Satrapi recounts her experiences growing up in Iran among a family of leftists during the Islamic revolution. As violence swirls around her, she deals with typical adolescent feelings while covertly rebelling against the regime of religious extremism and witnessing the destruction and violence of war. Hoping to find safety in Austria (in *Persepolis 2*), Satrapi struggles in new and different ways there before returning to Iran.

- **Boy from Clearwater.** By Pei-Yun Yu. Art by Jian-Xin Zhou. Tr. by Lin King. 2023. Levine Querido.

  Tshua Khun-Lim grew up in Taiwan during the White Terror era, and Yu, Zhou, and King adeptly describe his mostly idyllic childhood before he's arrested for joining a book club and receives a 10-year sentence as a political traitor—years he spends in a brutal, suffocating prison on a small island. In this and a second volume, Yu, Zhou, and King powerfully capture the sensation of fear as a newly restrictive political regime takes hold.

- **Ducks:** Two Years in the Oil Sands. By Kate Beaton. Art by the author. 2022. Drawn & Quarterly.

  Beaton's memoir recounts the years she spent working in the Alberta oil sands, far away from her home in Nova Scotia, which had been devastated by economic disinvestment. Like Satrapi, she feels crushing homesickness and experiences thoughtless cruelty away from home, but the stability afforded by the economic opportunity is hard to leave behind. Still, that stability comes at a cost, and she acutely describes the environmental and human impact of exploitative industries.

- **They Called Us Enemy.** By George Takei, Justin Eisinger, and Steven Scott. Art by Harmony Becker. 2019. Top Shelf.

  Takei has spoken publicly about his childhood experience in incarceration camps during WWII, and this graphic memoir tells that story again in a compelling blend of nostalgia and outrage. At first, when he and his family are forced to go to Camp Rohwer in Arkansas, he's young enough that it feels like an adventure, but when they're relocated to a camp with harsher conditions, it's clear that he's living through atrocity. An epilogue about contemporary political attitudes about migrants emphasizes the continued impact of xenophobia and racism in America.

Watchmen

Moore and Gibbons' postmodern skewering of superhero culture is a dense entry point for comics newbies, filled as it is with references and allusions to characters with decades-long back catalogs. But superheroes as a concept are enough in the cultural imagination that the story's big questions are easy to grasp: what does having unlimited power mean? And who

can be trusted to wield that power? Gibbons' virtuosic artwork makes those philosophical ruminations a thrill to look at.

- **20th Century Men.** By Deniz Camp. Art by Stipan Morian. Image.

  Watchmen dwelled significantly on the role of superheroes in geopolitics, specifically the war in Vietnam, and Camp and Morian explore similar territory here. They begin in Vietnam, but the main thrust of the conflict is between the USSR and the U.S. in Afghanistan. An armored "diplomatic hero-officer" (i.e., super soldier), Petar Platanov, the Iron-Star, is weary of war and all its violence, but power-hungry U.S. imperialists are salivating over the prospect of conquest with their own superpowered human weapon. Unlike *Watchmen*, *20th Century Men* allows the Afghans caught in the conflict to speak powerfully for themselves.

- **Kingdom Come.** By Mark Waid. Art by Alex Ross. DC.

  Familiar superhero faces are wrinkled and graying in this lushly illustrated miniseries. The Justice League has settled into a cozy retirement as a new generation of heroes steps in to protect the planet. Only, these new heroes lack the moral fortitude of their forbears, and a crisis brews as splintering factions stoke increasing violence as Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman consider what it truly means to be a hero. Ross' gorgeous gouache-painted panels have uncommon depth and artistry, giving this a sophisticated look.

- **Kurt Busiek's Astro City.** By Kurt Busiek. Art by Brent E. Anderson. DC.

  This long-running, award-winning series features vignettes centered on heroes, villains, and everyday people living in the titular Astro City. As in *Watchmen*, the myriad costumed heroes and villains are entirely original but hint at their more popular counterparts. But here, the tone is less fatalistic and more interested in mundane reality; the stories dwell on the workaday realities of superheroes (the drudgery of trying to maintain a secret identity while flitting from place to place to save the day) and the emotional reality for civilians (a small-time criminal grows increasingly paranoid that a hero is targeting him specifically). It's a clever approach that will satisfy fans of *Watchmen*'s expansive, perceptive world building.

From *Maybe an Artist*, written and drawn by Liz Montague.

The Appeal of the Real

Graphic Memoirs for Teens

By Scot Smith

Graphic memoirs—from Eisner's *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* to Spiegelman's *Maus,* Satrapi's *Persepolis,* Bechdel's *Fun Home,* and Telgemeier's trilogy of *Smile, Sisters*, and *Guts*—have played an important role in the evolution of comics as a medium since the 1970s. More contemporary titles like Kate Beaton's *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands* and John Lewis' *March* trilogy have also helped to increase the interest of the genre to multiple age groups. In recent years, publishers have released numerous graphic memoirs marketed to young adults. In addition to receiving critical acclaim as well as winning numerous awards, these titles have found a devoted audience among teen readers. But why? Graphic memoirs combine two things that most teens enjoy: the appeal of the real and comics. However, young adults are attracted to graphic memoirs for other reasons as well.

Graphic memoirs often feature realistic slice-of-life stories, in which coming-of-age is a major theme. Tales of the trials and tribulations of the teen years are staples of young adult literature, and graphic memoirs offer those types of stories in

abundance. Adolescence does not come with a road map, and many teens struggle with issues of identity and self-acceptance. Who am I? How did I become who I am? Where did I come from? Where do I go from here? Many young people frequently ask these same questions as they navigate adolescence, and the answers do not come easily. Graphic memoirs offer a unique opportunity for teens to learn how others traversed these tumultuous times. Friendship drama? Awkward crushes? Conflicts with parents? Bullies? Doubts about identity? First romance? First breakup? Issues at home and/or at school? The creators explore these topics and many more in their memoirs in ways that teens can comprehend and personally relate to.

In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud writes that "the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled." Teen readers develop a distinctive connection, almost like a social interaction, with the real-life characters they encounter on the pages of graphic memoirs because they *see* the cartoon representation of those characters within the panels of the artwork. Because of this association between creator and reader, young adults can uncover pathways to understanding their own journeys while they read about the lives of others.

If indeed the human brain is hardwired for story, then teens learn best when there is a narrative to follow. What are graphic memoirs but stories about the lives of others as told through the combination of text and images? Character development, conflict and resolution, climax, setting, tone, theme—all the literary elements one expects in fiction are also present in memoir. When important lessons about what it means to be human—lessons about coping with racism or anxiety or dealing with disappointment or the search for self-identity and self-worth—are presented within the narrative structure of a memoir without didacticism, then those lessons are more likely to

From *Halfway There*, written and drawn by Christine Mari.

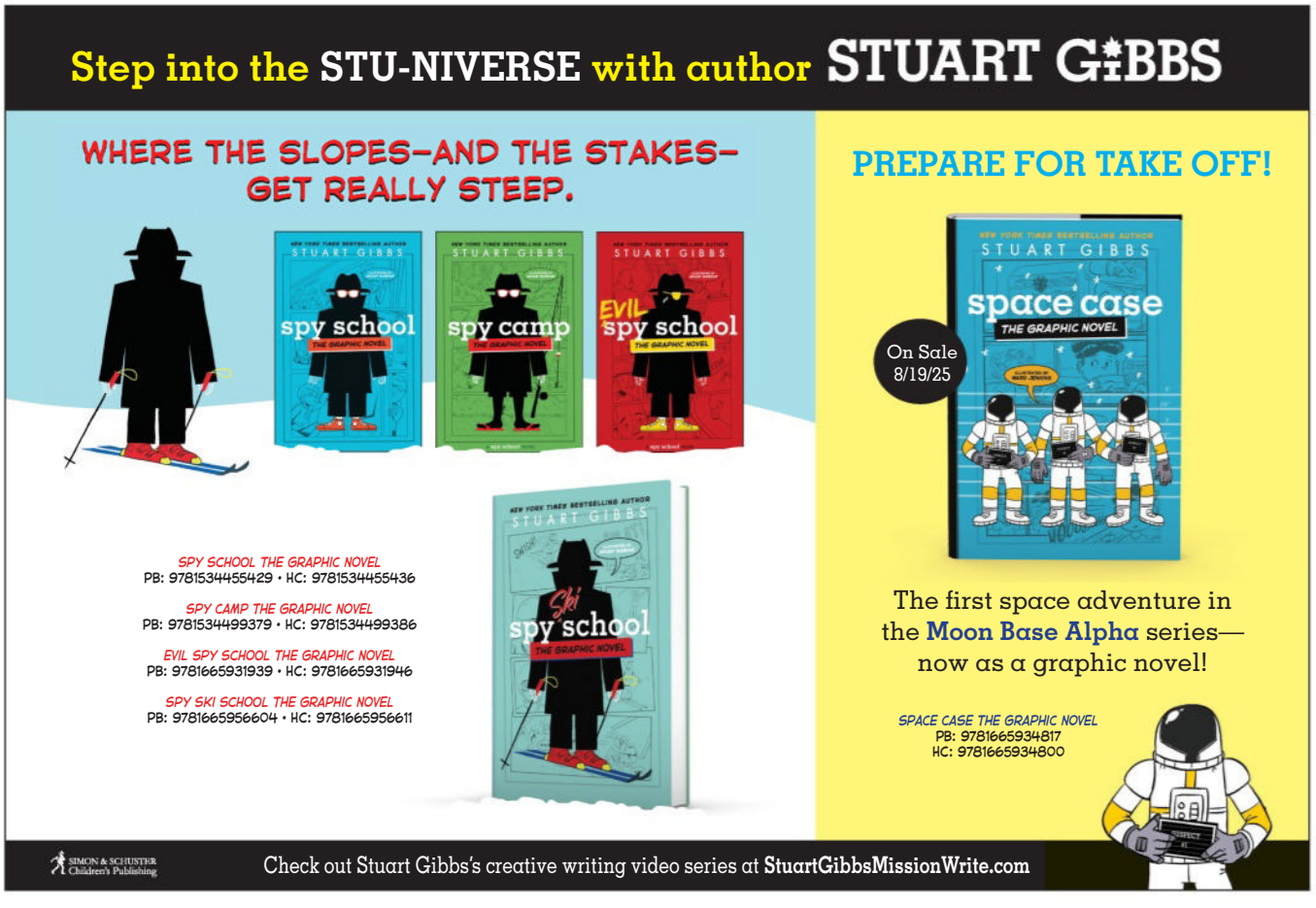
be remembered by teen readers and recalled at important times in their lives.

"Show, don't tell" is one of the most fundamental rules of writing for young adults. Because the images carry much of the weight of both plot and character development in graphic memoirs, creators can express their personal stories through the illustrations. By using the techniques of sequential art, the memoirist can depict character development and express themes through images rather than words. Graphic memoirists do not have to "tell" with text when they can show with illustrations. Facial expressions, emanata (the symbols that "emanate" from the characters) and iconography, the purposeful use of lines, and subtle shifts of color to express mood and tone are some the tools of graphic storytelling that creators use to show with images rather than tell through text.

Teen readers often seek out stories about perseverance and resilience, tales of how others their own age have overcome hardships and obstacles in their personal lives. These memoirs can be set in contemporary times or during historical periods. The key to these stories is the struggle of the protagonist, in this case, the memoirist. Conflicts against racism or homophobia, the fight for civil rights and social justice, and the difficulties of living with mental illness are examples of some of the topics found in today's young adult memoirs. Teens find these stories inspirational and informative as they may deal with similar issues in their lives or see parallels between the modern world and the events of the past.

While some teens seek stories that mirror their lived experiences, others look for vicarious experiences. These teens do not want to read memoirs about lives similar to their own. Rather, they pursue stories distinct from the realities of their own daily lives. These teens are curious about unfamiliar experiences and find value in reading stories about immigrants or refugees, struggles with mental health, and quests for gender and/or sexual identity that are unlike their own. The diversity found within contemporary YA graphic memoirs offers numerous opportunities for exactly this variety of reading—passports into the experiences of young people different from oneself.

Comics and teens share commonalities. Both are complicated and difficult to define because both are constantly evolving and changing. Just as no teen is identical to another, no graphic memoir is just like another. Some memoirs are somber in tone and delve deeply into social issues.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PIZZA HUT

From *Messy Roots: A Graphic Memoir of a Wuhanese American*, by Laura Gao, art by Laura Gao and Weiwei Xu.

Other creators take a more lighthearted approach to similar subjects and use humor to get their points across to their young audience. Because they are not monolithic with their preferences, teen readers are attracted to this diversity in tone. Whereas some prefer serious titles, other teens prefer a comedic approach. Some will want a mixture of both—solemn one day, humorous the next.

Who am I? How did I become who I am? Where did I come from? Where do I go from here? These are the fundamental and formative questions of adolescence. If reading a graphic memoir represents a social interaction and allows for dialogue between the young adults and the creators, then teens may arrive at an understanding of themselves and the complex world around them by reading about the diverse lived experiences of others. Young adults may develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the shared histories of others by interacting with the images and text found in these stories. Likewise, teens will come to appreciate the complexity of the world and its history on pages of graphic memoirs. Let's hope that the trend of well-crafted YA graphic memoirs continues, because teens need all the guidance that they can find to navigate this complicated world.

Recommendations of Recently Published Graphic Memoirs

The Circuit Graphic Novel. By Francisco Jiménez and Andrew J. Rostan. Art by Celia Jacobs. 2024. Clarion, $24.99 (9780358348214). Gr. 5–8.

This graphic adaptation follows the Jiménez family while they face numerous obstacles as migrant farm workers in California during the 1940s and 1950s.

Family Style: Memories of an American from Vietnam. By Thien Pham. Art by the author. 2023. First Second, $25.99 (9781250809711). Gr. 9–12.

Memories of food play a central role in Pham's story about his life as a Vietnamese refugee and cartoonist living in California.

A First Time for Everything. By Dan Santat. Art by the author. 2023. First Second, paper, $14.99 (9781250851048). Gr. 6–9.

Santat revisits a trip to Europe as a young teen and explores how those experiences helped to shape his life as an artist.

The Girl Who Sang: A Holocaust Memoir of Hope and Survival. By Estelle Nadel, Sammy Savos, and Bethany Strout. Art by Sammy Savos. 2024. Roaring Brook, $17.99 (9781250247773). Gr. 6–9.

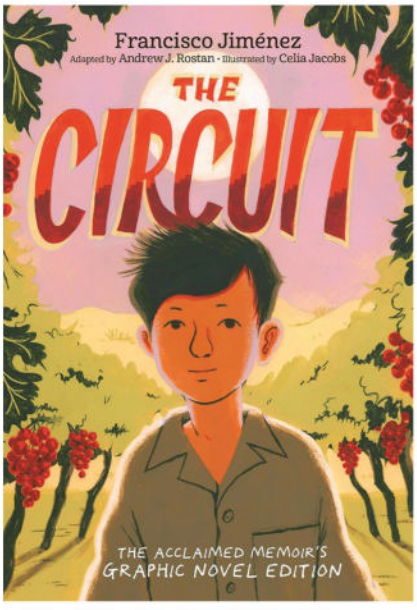
Holocaust survivor Nadel recounts her experiences as a child in hiding in Poland during WWII and what happened to her and the members of her family during and after the war.

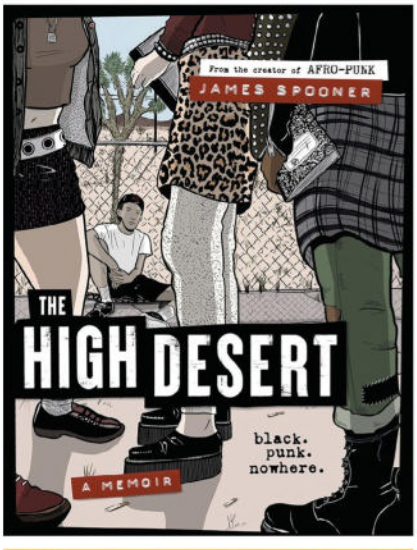
Halfway There: A Graphic Memoir of Self-discovery. By Christine Mari. Art by the author. 2024. Little, Brown Ink, $24.99 (9780316416658). Gr. 8–12.

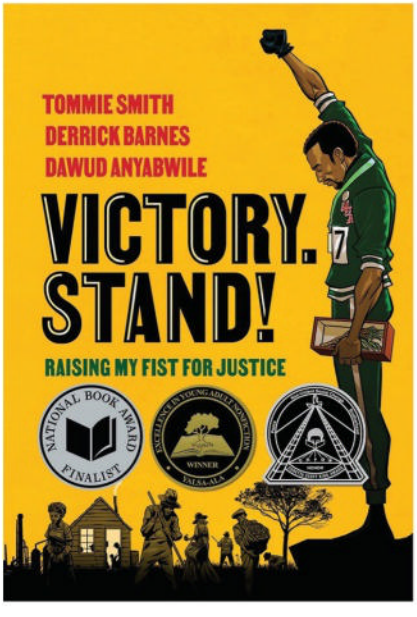
Mari details the struggles of returning to her birthplace of Tokyo to reconcile her identity as a young biracial college student.

Homebody. By Theo Parish. Art by the author. 2024. HarperAlley, $26.99 (9780063319592). Gr. 8–12.

Parish shares their adolescent search for gender identity and self-acceptance.


Francisco Jiménez
Adapted by Andrew J. Rostan · Illustrated by Celia Jacobs
THE CIRCUIT
THE ACCLAIMED MEMOIR'S GRAPHIC NOVEL EDITION





The High Desert: Black. Punk. Nowhere. By James Spooner. Art by the author. 2022. Mariner, $26.99 (9780358659112). Gr. 10–12.

Spooner reckons with identity, racism, romance, and music as he comes of age in a small California desert community.

In Limbo: A Graphic Memoir. By Deb JJ Lee. Art by the author. 2023. First Second, $24.99 (9781250252654). Gr. 9–12.

Lee examines the difficulties of feeling "in limbo" with friends, family, and community while growing up in South Korea and New Jersey.

Maybe an Artist: A Graphic Memoir. By Elizabeth Montague. Art by the author. 2022. Random House Studio, $24.99 (9780593307816). Gr. 7–12.

Montague describes her journey from aspiring artist as a child to the start of her career as a professional cartoonist.

Messy Roots: A Graphic Memoir of a Wuhanese American. By Laura Gao. Art by Laura Gao and Weiwei Xu. 2022. HarperAlley, $22.99 (9780063067776). Gr. 9–12.

In this humorous memoir, Gao explores her experiences as a queer Chinese immigrant growing up in Texas.

Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir. By Pedro Martín. Art by the author. 2023. Dial, $24.99 (9780593462287). Gr. 5–8.

In this humorous memoir, Martín recounts an epic road trip taken with his family when they traveled to Mexico to bring his legendary grandfather back to California.

Monstrous: A Transracial Adoption Story. By Sarah Myer. Art by the author. 2023. First Second, $25.99 (9781250268792). Gr. 8–12.

Born in South Korea and adopted by a white family in Maryland, Myer details how art, fandom, and cosplay helped them to cope with anxiety and the complex issues of identity.

Muhammad Najem, War Reporter: How One Boy Put the Spotlight on Syria. By Muhammad Najem and Nora Neus. Art by Julie Robine. 2022. Little, Brown Ink, paper, $12.99 (9780759556904). Gr. 6–9.

Muhammed recounts how he used video journalism and social media to share the horrors of the war in Syria to a global community.

Sunshine: How One Camp Taught Me about Life, Death, and Hope. By Jarrett J. Krosoczka. Art by the author. 2023. Scholastic/Graphix, $27.99 (9781338356328). Gr. 7–12.

Krosoczka recounts his high-school experiences as volunteer counselor at a camp for terminally ill children and teens.

Uprooted: A Memoir about What Happens When Your Family Moves Back. By Ruth Chan. Art by the author. 2024. Roaring Brook, $22.99 (9781250855336). Gr. 5–8.

Chan details how her comfortable life in Canada as a teenager was turned upside down when her family returned to Hong Kong for her father's new job.

Victory. Stand! Raising My Fist for Justice. By Tommie Smith and Derrick Barnes. Art by Dawud Anyabwile. 2022. Norton/Young Readers, $22.95 (9781324003908). Gr. 8–12.

Civil Rights activist Smith details his life as a track star as well as his controversial protest at the 1968 Summer Olympics.

Scot Smith worked in school libraries for almost 27 years. He is now an assistant professor of practice at the University of Tennessee's School of Information Sciences where he teaches courses in Young Adult Literature, Comics and Graphic Novels, and Programming for Children and Teens. He lives in historic Oak Ridge, Tennessee, with his wife, daughter, and two malevolent cats.

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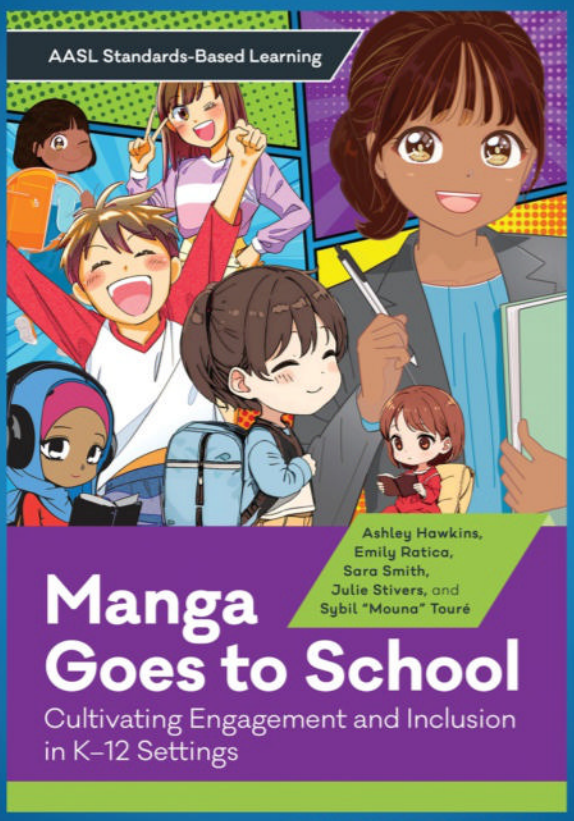
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Combatting Self-Censorship in a Conservative Community

By Brenda Lower

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Four years ago, at the beginning of 2021, I began ordering graphic novels for the Davis County Public Library (UT). Life was quite chaotic at the time—I was a relatively new branch manager, I had just transferred to a different branch, and we were still coping with COVID-19. Ordering was another big change for me, since I had never selected materials for a library before.

The person who had previously ordered graphic novels trained me, showing me the ins and outs of how we ordered as well as a few sources she used to find new titles and reviews. She reviewed my orders before they were submitted, but I would do the majority of the selection. Eager to begin, I dove into a new world of comics, manga, and graphic novels.

A few months into the ordering, she contacted me about the first book in a series I had added to an order. She said, "Are you aware it's really similar to this other series that you ordered last month?" I wasn't aware. It caught my eye and I thought it would be a good fit for the system. With her guidance, I was able to look for a different title to create a more diverse collection, not just a collection in line with my tastes.

Several factors have influenced my ordering process. The area my library serves has a high percentage of fairly conservative people, which is my personal background as well. In addition, I have personal preferences of what I like (fantasy), what I don't like (horror), as well as art styles I enjoy. As my experience with ordering has grown, I've come to recognize—with help from others—that no matter how I try, there will always be a few things I struggle with when it comes to ordering.

This isn't just me: all of us are influenced by our personal tastes, past experiences, and even what happened that day as we try to make decisions about ordering materials. I struggle with horror as well as long-running comics series. (It's hard to know where to start!) Here are some ways I've found to order a more well-rounded selection of items:

- Be purposeful in your inclusion of diverse titles. While my county has a very high white demographic, we serve everyone in the county and strive to have books that reflect the various cultures and backgrounds of our population. Plus, everyone benefits from reading diverse books. When I see a book with diverse representation, particularly something different from my own experiences, I make sure to pay attention to it. Fortunately, there's a lot to choose from now!
- Look for recommendations from your community. The Davis County Library has an online form that patrons can fill out to suggest titles for purchase. While I don't have the budget to buy everything patrons submit, I approach these as guideposts for what the community is interested in. There have been series

that I decline once, but then another request comes in for the same thing so I take another look, since there is popular demand for it.

- Get input and recommendations from multiple sources. This can be sources of reviews such as *Booklist* or other professional magazines, as well as following social media accounts of people sharing recommendations. As you look at these, follow a variety of people who recommend a wide range of titles. Look for various publishers, from larger names to smaller indie companies. The more choices you explore, the more well-rounded your collection will be.
- Don't dismiss a title simply because it's not something you would personally read. Ever since working in a library, my personal reading tastes have grown broader, but there are titles I choose not to read. I'm not a horror fan in books or movies, so I've had to train myself to look twice at horror titles and not dismiss them since they don't align with my tastes.
- Always have another person to look over what you are ordering. They might see a trend in what you order that you do not. They might also find potential errors like accidentally putting an adult book in the children's area.
- Get other staff members' opinions on what to order. My system recently introduced a method whereby I get feedback from other staff members on titles to order. While I try to be impartial and factual with what I order, I have a lot of duties and don't have time to research as much as I might like. This has been a great way to balance my influence on what we order and cast a wider net for reviews and suggestions.

Over the last few years, book challenges in my area have grown, much like in the rest of the nation. As a branch manager, I review the materials challenged and the concerns of the patrons, taking each one seriously. Similar to my ordering process, I have had to disconnect my personal views from the process, instead relying on the established library policies to guide my evaluation of the item.

I remember one book in particular had content directly attacking some of my beliefs. I found myself getting more and more upset as I continued reading, to the point of scoffing as I read. Realizing I was getting too emotionally involved, I decided to take notes to separate my responses into sections: how I personally felt about the content versus how this book fits into the library's collection. With this, I was able to acknowledge how the book contrasted with my views but also see how this item had a right to represent a different viewpoint. I ended up recommending we keep the book in the system, despite how it conflicted with my personal views.

After this, I created a template to help me whenever an item was challenged. This template helps me gather information about the challenged item, including reviews, awards, which collection other libraries have it in, and the patron's concerns. Through it, I can approach each challenge with an even-handed stance, putting aside my beliefs to focus on library policy and the value each item has in representing the diverse population the library serves. I have used this template for several challenges and continue to modify it when needed.

The first time one of the graphic novels I ordered for the library was challenged, I was nervous going into the review process. I used the same approach, filled out my template with the relevant information, and was gratified to find I was able to approach the situation with that policy-focused mindset. With the information at hand, I was able to make a confident recommendation to keep the graphic novel in the collection.

Libraries are essential to their communities and have the opportunity to reflect the diverse nature of their community in their collection. Over the last four years, selecting the materials for our collection has shown me the importance of setting aside personal influences to provide a diverse collection for all to use.

Brenda Lower currently works at the Davis County Library in Utah and is passionate about libraries and books. She's worked in libraries and bookstores for almost 20 years and more recently picked up writing in her spare time. Her superpower is matching a person with the right book!

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From *Day Off*, written and drawn by DailyGreens.

Manhua in Print

By Marissa Hause

Asian media has been gaining popularity in recent years, making it more easily accessible. Netflix is streaming donghua (Chinese animation) and Chinese live-action series like *Scissor Seven* and *Love Between Fairy and Devil*. Crunchyroll streams donghua like *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*. In the last two years at fan conventions like Supercon, Otakufest, and Nekocon, I've seen cosplays of the works of celebrated author Mo Xiang Tong Xiu and panels on danmei (gay Chinese romance novels). At my library, patrons are coming in with video game *Genshin Impact* buttons on their bags, reading through the library's manga and boba tea cookbooks, and asking for more. And I know I am not the only one seeing this phenomenon. Libraries can cater to these patrons' interests in Asian media by offering them manhua.

Manhua are comics that originate from China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong. If they come from China or Taiwan, they are read left to right, while those from Hong Kong are read right to left. Most of what's published in the U.S. is in color, often using ink and watercolor paintings.

Manhua has several specific subgenres. Two are influenced by Taoist beliefs: xianxia is set in ancient China with cultivators and martial artists who expand their life span with spiritual practice (such as *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*); wuxia are about chivalrous martial artists in ancient China (such as *Nirvana in Fire*).

Manhua is very much a product of the culture from which it comes but also shares some genres common to other formats of literature. *Day Off* by DailyGreens is a slice-of-life story that shows how life is for gay men in Taiwan, one of two Asian countries that have legalized same-sex marriage (as of this writing). *I Ship My Rival x Me* is a rom-com that explores fan culture in China. *The Boy from Clearwater* is a memoir that covers Taiwan's history from Japanese occupation through the White Terror era.

Currently, manhua is receiving lots of support from its countries of origin in an effort to expand the format's reach worldwide. In Taiwan in 2010, the government started the Golden Comics Award to recognize the best comics in their country and help them get recognition internationally. Taiwan's Ministry of Culture also created the website Books from Taiwan (https://booksfromtaiwan.moc.gov.tw/), which provides information on which titles have been licensed in the U.S. Taiwan's president, Lai Ching-te, even recommended *Day Off* on Instagram in February 2025.

In Hong Kong, the government sponsors the HK Comics Support Programme, which helps experts mentor newer artists, and the government then funds the new manhua. *Indigo* by Chi-kit Kwong was the 2023 Hong Kong Comic Support Programme Gold Award–winner. The participants in the program also travel

to Angoulême International Comics Festival in France, one of the largest comics festivals in the world. Chi-kit Kwong was among those attending; two of his works, *Indigo* and *The Architect's Epiphany*, are being published by Nakama Press this year.

Bilibili, the Chinese animation and manhua company, ran a campaign in 2022 for fans to vote for their favorites. One of the fan favorites was *Heaven Official's Blessing*. The company went to Los Angeles Anime Expo in 2023 to promote their donghua *Link Click* and *Heaven Official's Blessing*. In 2024, Aloha Comics published the manhua of both titles in the U.S.

If your patrons are ready to explore the growing world of manhua, here are a few titles to consider for your collections.

The Architect's Epiphany. By Chi-Ho Kwong. Art by Chi-Kit Kwong. Aug. 2025. Nakama, $10.99 (9781545819029).

A sweeping adventure story set in a world full of fantastical creatures and magical powers. Driven by pride and vocation, the protagonists undertake a dire mission in search of hope and redemption amid the rise and fall of a civilization.

The Boy from Clearwater. By Pei-Yun Yu. Art by Jian-Xin Zhou. Tr. by Lin King. 2023. Levine Querido, $25.99 (9781646142798).

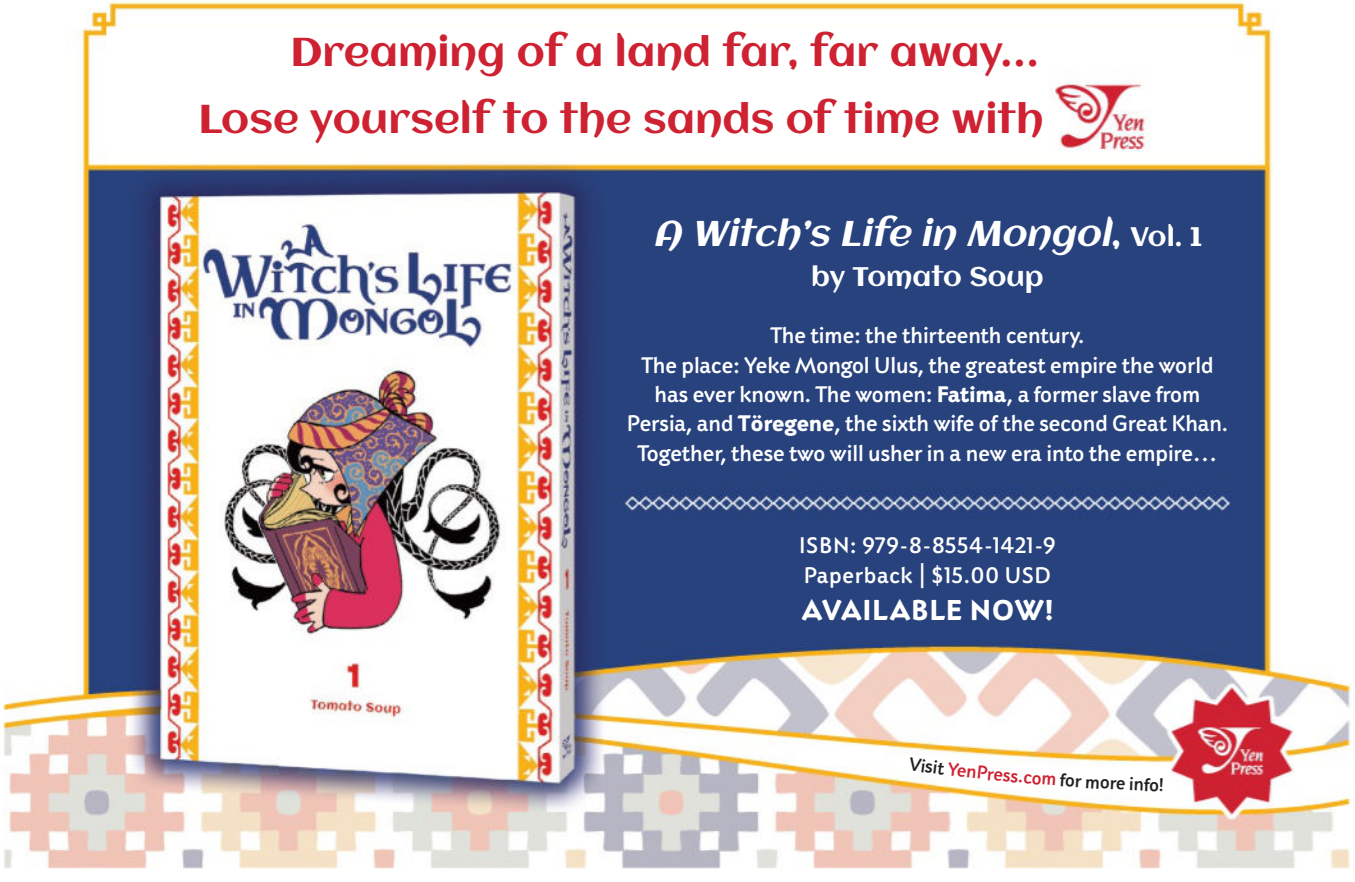
The true story of Tshua Khun-lim as he lives through Taiwan's Japanese occupation and the White Terror era. A 2024 ALA Best Graphic Novels for Adults and the 2021 Golden Comics Awards Best New Talent winner.

Day Off. By Qing Cai aka DailyGreens. Art by the author. Tr. by Ann Gree and Charlie Robinson. 2024. Aloha, $19.99 (9781638380207).

Depicts the sweet daily life of Hua Xiaofei and his boss, Shi Dongyun, as they work together and deepen their relationship.

Dinghai Fusheng Records. By Fei Tian and Ye Xiang. Art by Qian Er Bai. Tr. by Elestrea and moon. 2024. Seven Seas, $19.99 (9798891605039).

The last Great Exorcist is on a journey to find his fated Protector, Martial God, otherwise known as the condemned criminal Xiang Shu, and together defeat the evil Mara before he dies at the age of 20. The danmei novel by the same name is also available.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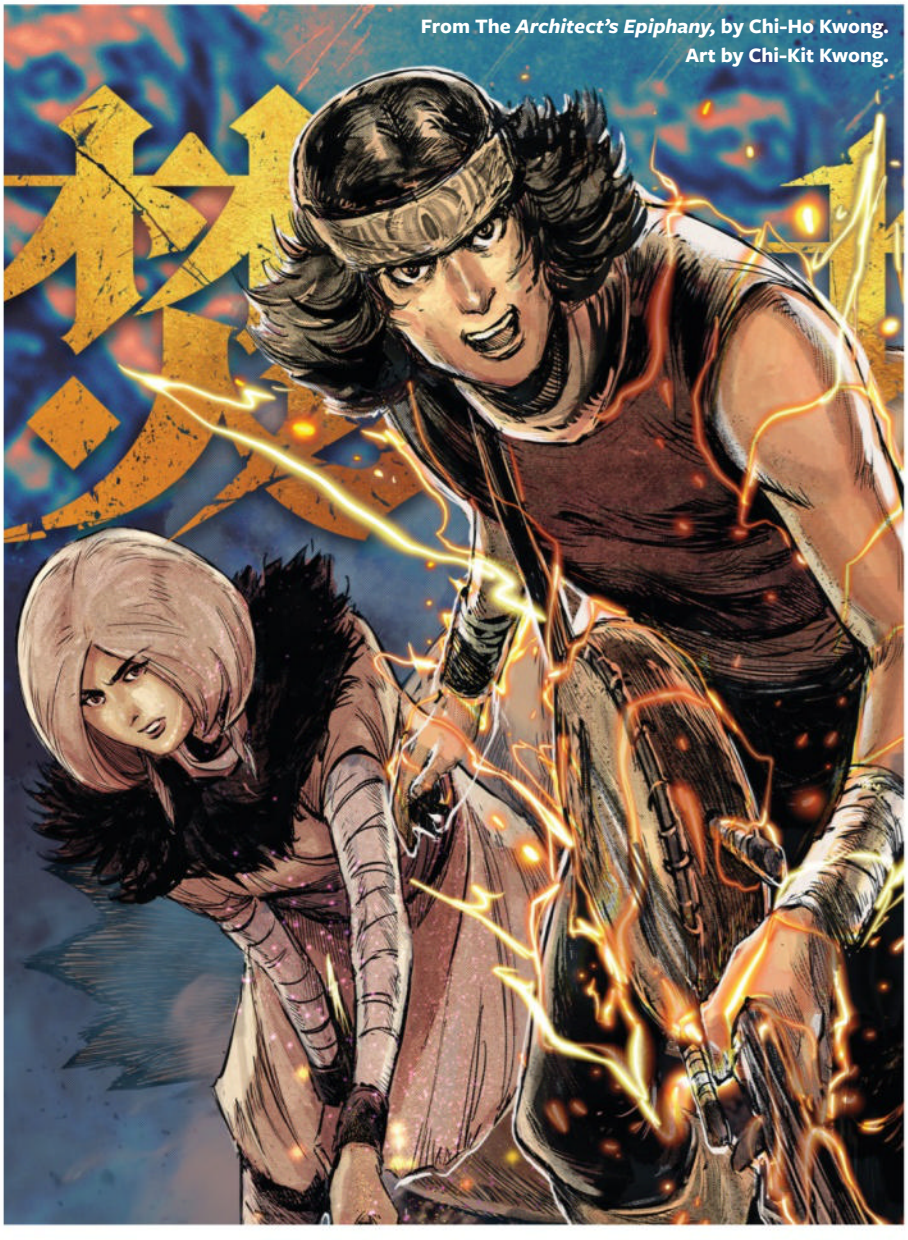
Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation: Mo Dao Zu Shi. By Mo Xiang Tong Xiu. Art by Luo Di Cheng Qiu. Tr. by Meowmeow. 2023. Seven Seas, $19.99 (9781638585237).

The powerful cultivator Wei Wuxian died in his first life because his necromancy powers were feared, but in his second life, Lan Wangji, a righteous cultivator, helped him dispel the mysteries surrounding those powers. Also available as danmei novels; the donghua is streaming on Crunchyroll, and the live action, *The Untamed*, is on Netflix.

Heaven Official's Blessing. Based on the novels by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu. Aloha Comics, $29.99 (9798888433201).

While on a mission in the earthly realm to discover why brides are missing, the god Xie Lian meets a mysterious stranger with whom he has an instant connection. The danmei novels of the same name are available in English. The donghua is streaming on Netflix.



From The *Architect's Epiphany*, by Chi-Ho Kwong. Art by Chi-Kit Kwong.

Here U Are. By DJun. Art by the author. Tr. by Charlie Robinson. 2024. Aloha, $19.99 (9781638380214).

In this opposites-attract romance, out-and-proud college sophomore Yu Yang looks after the taciturn freshman Lu Huan. These two start off butting heads but over time they overcome obstacles and their love begins to bloom.

I Ship My Rival x Me. By Pepa. Art by Qualia. 2024. Seven Seas, $19.99 (9798891604971).

Actor Wei Yanzi discovers he's being shipped online with rival idol Gu Yiliang—and starts falling for him while they work together.

Indigo. By Chi-Ho Kwong. Art by Chi-Kit Kwong. May 2025. Nakama, $10.99 (9781545819036).

A reporter with supernatural abilities investigates the death of a professor and finds out her destiny is to decide the fate of the universe.

Link Click. By Li Haolin. Art by the author. Tr. by Ann Gree and Qiutian. 2024. Aloha, $24.99 (9781638380191).

Cheng Xiaoshi and Lu Guang run the Time Photo Studio, time traveling to fulfill clients' requests while making sure they don't change the past. The donghua is available on Crunchyroll.

Nirvana in Fire. By Hai Yan. Art by Chen Si. Tr. by Ann Gree. 2024. Aloha, $19.99 (9781638380221).

Genius strategist Mei Changsu is on a quest to clear the names of his wrongly executed comrades. To achieve his goal, he'll ally with one of the emperor's sons, who aims to use him as a pawn to win the throne.

Marissa Hause is a public librarian who has worked in libraries since 2014 in Pennsylvania, Florida, and Virginia. She started reading manga as a teen and has since expanded into manhwa and manhua.

From *Graphic Public Health: A Comics Anthology and Road Map*, by Meredith Li-Vollmer.

Wait, You've Got WHAT in Your Graphic Medicine Collection?

By Matthew Noe

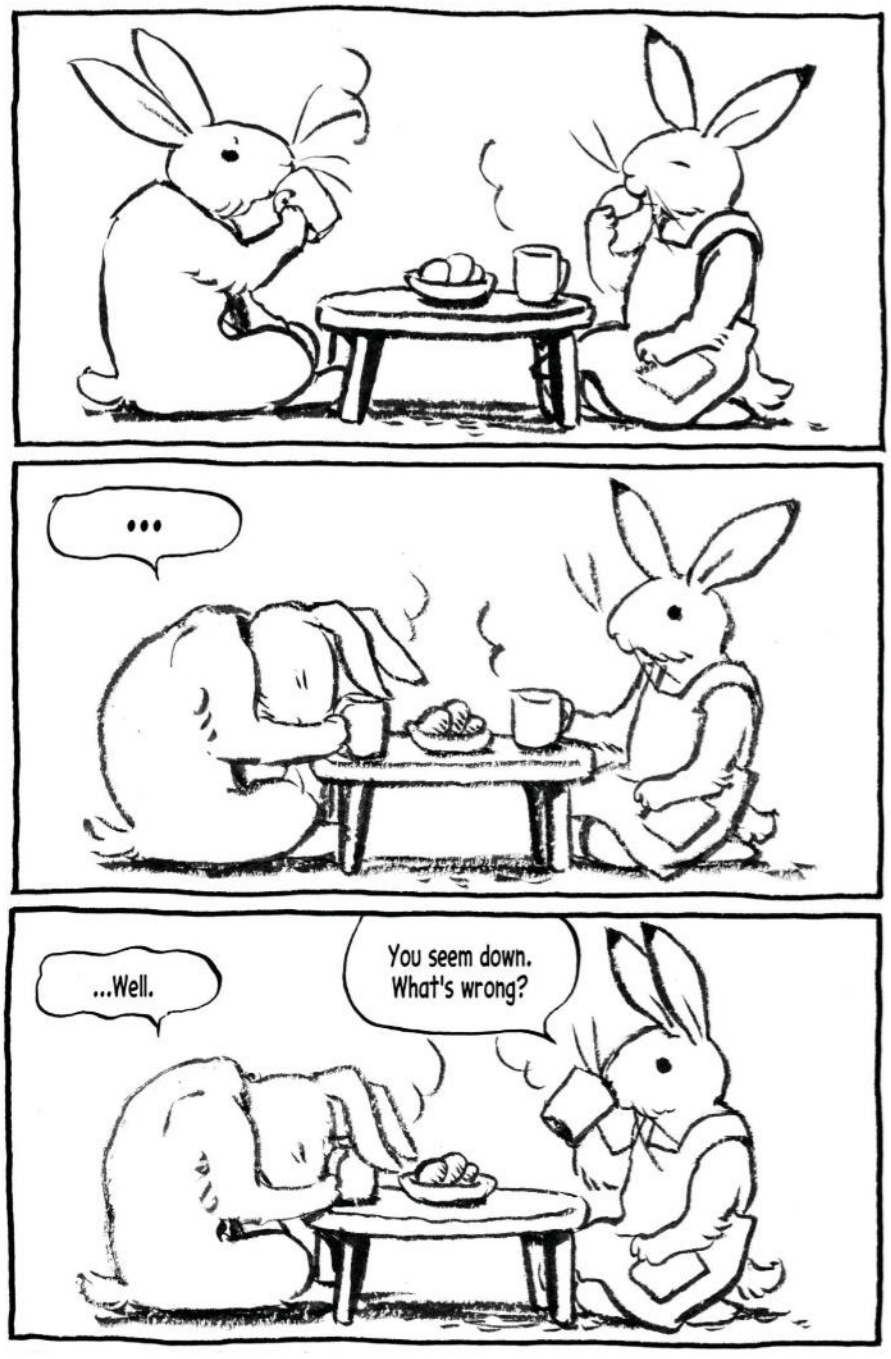
Long-time readers of *Booklist's Guide to Graphic Novels in Libraries* will be familiar with graphic medicine, with articles about the field included from the beginning (e.g., my article "Healthcare for the Masses" in 2019; "Graphic Medicine as Library Outreach," by Chanda Briggs and Claire Sharifi, in 2024). For those who might need a reminder, graphic medicine, as coined by physician-cartoonist Ian Williams in 2007, refers to the intersection between the discourse of healthcare and the medium of comics. While examples of the genre have existed for nearly the entire history of comics as a medium, the last two decades have seen an explosive level of growth. And not just in volume, but in critical acclaim. For example, *Menopause: A Comic Treatment* (2020), edited by MK Czerwiec, won Eisner Awards for both Best Anthology and Best Short Story in 2021, and in 2023 *Ripple Effects* (2022), by Jordan Hart, Bruno Chiroleu, et al., was nominated for both an Eisner and Harvey Award for Digital Comic and was named the 2024 Dwayne McDuffie awardee for Diversity in Comics.

Here I should pause and ask: Did you notice that I called graphic medicine both a "field" and a "genre?" This is on purpose! In fact, when asked to talk about graphic medicine, I often follow up with a request for more information before diving in because we are really talking about four distinct things. There's graphic medicine as genre, as field of study, as practice, and as community/communities.

Most graphic medicine collections, and, I'd argue, most programming too, focus primarily on the "as genre" category—that is, collecting comics about health topics (narrowly defined), inviting creators to talk about those comics, and/or having book groups about those comics. This makes sense, but it can be limiting, especially if you are working in an academic, medical, or other specialized library setting where comics are still relatively uncommon. Put another way: in recent years, libraries have done a great job at going *deep* with graphic medicine but have succeeded far less at going *wide* with it. Keeping the categories already noted as our guideposts, I'd like us to think about what other possibilities are out there and encourage you to try them out in your library. (Note: these are not hard-and-fast categories and more often than not, recommended titles fit in multiple categories at once.)

Field of Study

Graphic medicine is a field of study focused on exploring the intersection between comics and experiences of health and illness. This category is the



From *Giga Town,* written and drawn by Fumiyo Kouno.

one that most directly lines up with the accepted definition, as coined by Ian Williams. This is where we should consider things like the evaluation of specific comics for specific purposes (e.g., "we made this comic to teach people about vaccines—does it work?"), as well as the historical, material, and textual analysis of comics. This is also where we might think about the potential for comics as a presentation tool—think conference posters or scholarly articles but presented in the comics medium. Consider holding open-studio-style events to encourage patrons to play with these approaches!

Books in this category are most likely to be of interest to academics, but public libraries should also keep them in mind: comics studies can attract independent scholars! A few recent suggestions include:

Petrochemical Fantasies: The Art and Energy of American Comics. By Daniel Worden. Ohio State Univ., $34.95 (9780814259184).

Blending comics studies and environmental humanities, Worden traces the long, intertwined history of American comics and the growth of coal and oil. This is of particular interest due to the increasing need to focus on environmental health in the face of climate change.

Show Me Where It Hurts: Manifesting Illness and Impairment in Graphic Pathography. By Monica Chiu. Penn State Univ., $114.95 (9780271096827).

Through a series of deep readings on recently published (as of 2024) pathographies—defined as long-form comics by and about subjects who suffer from disease—Chiu expands on the arguments of the *Graphic Medicine Manifesto*, arguing that these comics provide resistance to the singular-narrative of illness and may serve as a tool to foster necessary change in the face of inequality in healthcare.

Understanding Comics-Based Research: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists. By Veronica Moretti. Emerald, $60 (9781837534630).

This is a strong entry point for thinking about how comics can be used in social-science research—not just as a means of reporting but as a method of collecting narratives. An important work for those interested in the (slowly) emerging practice of graphic ethnography.

Practice

Graphic medicine as a practice is focused on integrating comics into the practice, promotion, and education of individuals engaged in systems of healthcare. The short version of this

one is to think about both the creation of comics and the use of comics in practical ways (patient education, graphic recording, etc.). For libraries, this is where you would want to think about building out your collection with books from the likes of Lynda Barry (*Syllabus* and *Making Comics*) and Ivan Brunetti (*Cartooning: Philosophy and Practice*) to encourage development of cartooning skills. You might also point patrons to the Sequential Artists Workshop (SAW), the Center for Cartoon Studies (CCS), and/or the Graphic Medicine International Collective (GMIC) for online workshops and trainings (see "Communities," below).

A couple of newer titles of interest for the practice of graphic medicine include:

Giga Town: The Guide to Manga Iconography! By Fumiyo Kōno. Udon, $12.99 (9781772943085).

Along the same lines as Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, this text provides a clear, understandable starting place for newcomers to manga, while also providing plenty to chew on for the long-time reader, all through the clever use of animals inspired by a famous Japanese scroll. Essential reading for those interested in exploring Japan Graphic Medicine's history of medical manga (https://graphicmedicine.jp/).

Graphic Public Health: A Comics Anthology and Road Map. By Meredith Li-Vollmer. Penn State Univ., $25.95 (9780271093253).

A must-have title right alongside the now-classic *Graphic Medicine Manifesto*, Li-Vollmer's book encourages readers to conceive of a broader view of comics and health, seeking practice at a systems and community level, rather than just individual, and tackling wider concerns such as climate change and health inequity. Includes essays and comics examples by both Li-Vollmer and collaborators.

Communities

Graphic medicine is a community of enthusiasts, connected by shared appreciation for the power of comics to make an impact in the practice of healthcare and the experiences of health, illness, disability, and caregiving. This particular category is the hardest to define and is perhaps best understood through the lens of the Graphic Medicine International Collective's Drawing Together program (https://www.graphicmedicine.org/drawingtogether/). Drawing Together was initially launched as a way to keep the community together in the face of social isolation and the cancellation of the 2020 conference by hosting regular Zoom sessions during which a facilitator led people through drawing exercises, sharing with one another both artistic progress and personal challenges. Over time, recordings of the facilitated exercises grew and have become a valuable teaching tool, all the while, a smaller group of dedicated participants continues to meet regularly.

There are few books that specifically fit into this category, given that we are talking about community building more than anything else, but I do want to offer a programming opportunity along with one suggested title:

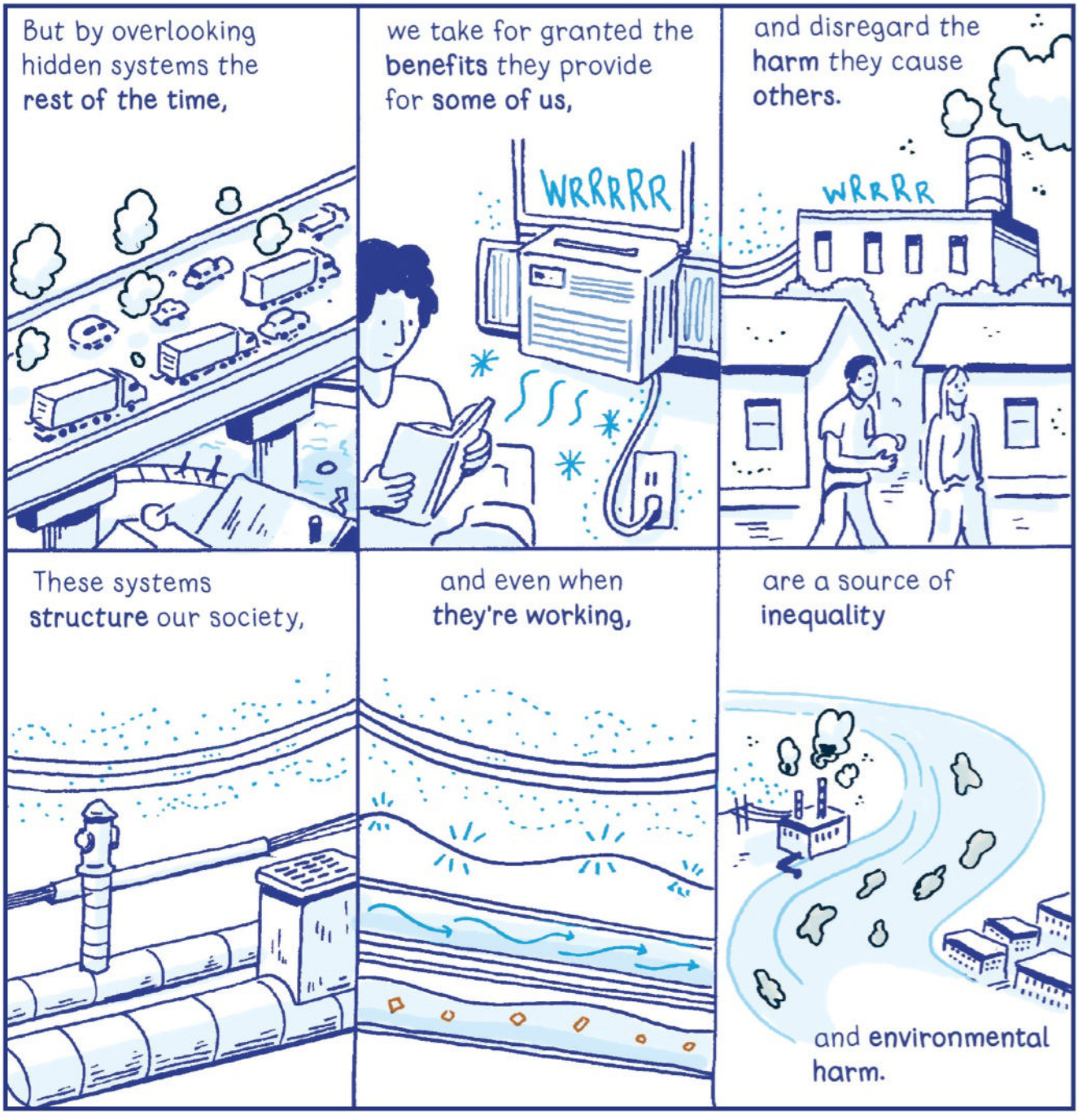
Graphic Medicine. Ed. by Erin La Cour and Anna Poletti. Univ. of Hawai'i, $25 (9780824893330).

A combination of essays, both written and illustrated, as well as original comics from a range of authors, highlights different ways of experiencing health and illness, suggests new ways to extend graphic medicine, and interrogates our understanding of the way cultural contexts intersect with healthcare.

Graphic Medicine: Ill-Conceived and Well-Drawn. National Library of Medicine, https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/graphicmedicine/index.html.

Launched in 2018 with guest

From *Mazebook*, written and drawn by Jeff Lemire


But by overlooking hidden systems the rest of the time,
we take for granted the benefits they provide for some of us,
WRRRRR
and disregard the harm they cause others.
WRRRR
These systems structure our society,
and even when they're working,
are a source of inequality
and environmental harm.

From *Hidden Systems: Water, Electricity, the Internet, and the Secrets behind the Systems We Use Every Day*, written and drawn by Dan Nott.

curator Ellen Forney, this is one of the National Library of Medicine's numerous traveling exhibits. Libraries can request to be a host for the exhibit and receive a series of banners to use as a focal point for programming. In winter 2024, I hosted the exhibit at Countway Library and organized six weeks of programming to introduce the campus to graphic medicine through both talks and interactive, creative programming (countway.harvard.edu/services/collections/graphic-medicine-countway#event%20series).

Genre (revisited)

Graphic medicine is a genre of comics focused on presentation of stories or information about, broadly, experiences of health and illness. There are two pain points with this definition: defining comics and defining the boundaries of "medicine." While

there are interesting debates to be had about the definition of comics, that is beyond the scope of this article; we are interested, however, in the boundaries of health and illness and the types of stories represented.

The most common comics found in graphic-medicine collections are memoirs, about either cancer or a mental-health condition, or educationally focused comics, either about a specific field of science or, increasingly commonly, about gender and sexuality. These are all worthy of attention and *should* be part of your collection—but we need not limit ourselves to these areas! Superheroes, horror, history, environmentalism, social sciences, fantasy, slice-of-life, coming-of-age, etc.—all are potential sites for works of graphic medicine. The key, then, is understanding what your specific patron communities are doing with the books.

Some comics not traditionally thought of as graphic medicine—such as the March trilogy by the late John Lewis, Nate Powell, and Andrew Aydin—make sense in virtually any collection because of the vital importance of understanding social, cultural, and political realities when discussing the experiences of health and illness. Others will only make sense in specific settings. For example, my collection includes Hiromu Arakawa's beloved manga series Fullmetal Alchemist, because its themes are of great interest to bioethics. But I would find it hard to justify including it in a collection found in a small hospital setting because it is too far removed from immediate reality.

Keeping this in mind, I'll end with some fun examples to consider that are outside the traditional boundaries of graphic medicine. Remember to think *wide*—and share your ideas with us next time!

A Haunted Girl. By Ethan Sacks, Naomi Sacks, Marco Lorenzana, Andres Mossa, and Jaime Martinez. Image Comics, $14.99 (9781534397774).

Inspired by a real-life experience, this horror comic about anxiety, depression, and suicide will demand the attention of anyone who has experienced the pain of suicidal ideation as well as fans of horror comics alike. Perhaps don't read before bed, as some of the ghosts *will* haunt you.

Becoming a Scientist. By Adrian Liston and Yulia Lapko. Self-Published, $3 (9781738487936). Free online at https://issuu.com/adrian.liston/docs/becoming_a_scientist.

This one doesn't stretch the definition of medicine so much as it encourages us to consider different pathways to becoming a member of the scientific community. By asking 12 different scientists to share their origin story, this anthology invites readers to stay curious and not take no for an answer.

DC Comics: Anatomy of a Metahuman. By S. D. Perry, Matthew Manning, and Ming Doyle. Insight Editions, $60 (9781608875016).

This is the book in my collection that often elicits the most immediately excitement from students because it is just. so. cool. Brilliantly illustrated, this offers a view into the anatomy and abilities of many of DC's most well-known super-powered characters.

Hidden Systems: Water, Electricity, the Internet, and the Secrets Behind the Systems We Use Every Day. By Dan Nott. RH Graphic, $18 (9781984896049).

Did you ever stop and think about what is under your feet as you walk through the city? If so, this comic is for you! Investigating the vital infrastructure of life that goes unnoticed until something breaks, this painstakingly lined comic may well be required reading.

Jane Foster: The Saga of The Mighty Thor. By Jason Aaron, ND Stevenson, Russell Dauterman, and others. Marvel, $44.99 (9781302934873).

Dr. Jane Foster is dealing with a lot. Being the new Thor, for one thing, but that may be easier than enduring the cancer she is secretly living with, which is killing her faster every time she transforms. This collection is a great way to read this modern superhero epic without hunting down half a dozen books.

Mazebook. By Jeff Lemire. Dark Horse, $29.99 (9781506723662).

A fantasy psychological thriller that invites the reader to consider what they might do in the depths of grief. In artwork drawn as only Lemire can, the colors of the comic will draw readers in just as much as the story itself does.

Policing the City: An Ethno-Graphic. By Didier Fassin, Frédéric Debomy, and Jake Raynal. Other, $25.99 (9781635422504).

The tedium of daily patrols and the banality of racism combine come together to explain the problematic nature of policing, both in France and the U.S., in this adaptation of the essay *Enforcing Order*.

Yokohama Kaidashi Kikou, v.1. By Hitoshi Ashinano. Seven Seas, $24.99 (9781638585442).

Recently released in five deluxe English volumes, this beautifully illustrated manga follows the life of Alpha, an android running a small café in a seaside town after an environmental catastrophe fundamentally altered the world. Equal parts cozy and pensive, this is one of my favorite reads of all time and is perfect for readers struck by climate anxiety.

Matthew Noe is Lead Collection & Knowledge Management Librarian at Harvard Medical School, an instructor for the University of Kentucky and Library Juice Academy, and a Trustee for the Worcester Public Library. He is a former President for the American Library Association's Graphic Novels and Comics Round Table and the Treasurer for the Graphic Medicine International Collective.

Zines as Graphic Medicine

A Program for Library Workers

By Cassy Lee

Photo by Cassy Lee.

Library workers dedicate their time and energy to serving their communities, but it's also important that they take care of their own well-being. Burnout, compassion fatigue, and workplace stress are common challenges in the profession. How can we make space for self-care and healing?

Graphic medicine is a growing field in comics, featuring themes of health and wellness. Visual narratives by and about people who experience mental or physical health issues can offer solace and aid to those who live with similar issues as well as cultivating empathy and support from their caregivers and loved ones. What if we applied these ideas to our own stresses and traumas as library workers?

By carving out time to reflect on how we maintain wellness, this graphic medicine zine-making program can become an act of self-care, a way to promote health literacy among the library team, and possibly even an advocacy tool to raise awareness of the health issues library workers face.

Background

Graphic medicine is a term coined by Ian Williams, a physician and comics artist who defines it as "the intersection between the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare" (See Williams' website GraphicMedicine.org for more). An exhibit on the National Library of Medicine's website (https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/graphicmedicine/) simply defines it as "the use of comics to tell personal stories of illness and health."

Zines are small, self-published booklets of text and images, a format popularized in the 1970s as a countercultural tool that anyone with access to a copy machine could use to distribute their stories and ideas. It's such an accessible, powerful medium, requiring few materials, that, currently, many libraries hold zine programming events, and some even have zine collections.

The DIY nature of zines encourages honest, personal storytelling without the pressure of perfection that comes with traditional publishing, so it's also a natural medium to use for graphic medicine. There are many examples out there, including the zines page on the GraphicMedicine.org site and the collection of zines that NPR curated during the pandemic called the Quaranzine Project. It seems that by creating zines about personal stories of illness and health, individuals can process emotions, share experiences, and cultivate resilience.

Given all of that, I thought zines and graphic medicine could be a beneficial combination for programming for library workers. To that end, I designed a zine workshop to help library workers explore their own stresses and wellness strategies. At ALA Annual 2024 in San Diego, I hosted this hands-on Zine Pavilion workshop called "Zines as Graphic Medicine for Librarians," introducing the concept of graphic medicine and the power of zine-making as a self-care practice. The session was well attended and provided a space for creative expression, reflection, and camaraderie.

Introduction to Graphic Medicine & Zines

The first part of the workshop was a 15-minute presentation on how comics and zines can address health and wellness, with examples of graphic medicine comics and zines and their impact. The slides for this

presentation can be found at bit.ly/LibrarianZines. During the Q&A, several library workers shared how they run zine programming and zine fests with their patrons at schools and public libraries. Afterward, participants were invited to make a simple eight-page mini-zine folded from one sheet of paper and were given prompts to help them tell their personal stories of illness and health as related to being a library worker.

Zine-Making Activity

Timeframe: 30 minutes to 1 hour
Materials:

- Instructions for folding a one-sheet zine
- Printer paper or colored paper
- Magazines with lots of words and images
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Pencils/pens/markers/colored pencils
- Erasers
- Some sample zines

I provided printed instructions on how to fold a mini-zine from one sheet of regular-size printer paper and led a demonstration as well. Participants were provided with prompts to follow but were also encouraged to tell their own stories in whatever manner they wished.

The sample prompts I developed were intended to help library workers reflect on their overall well-being at work, both externally and internally. There are many things about our work environments we can't control, but I wanted participants to gain a sense of empowerment, a sense that we do have choice over our responses to stimuli and our own bodies and mindset.

A handout with the folding instructions and prompts can be found here: https://bit.ly/LibrarianZinePrompts.

Sample Prompts
Page 1 (Cover): This Library Life - Your Name / Image representing you

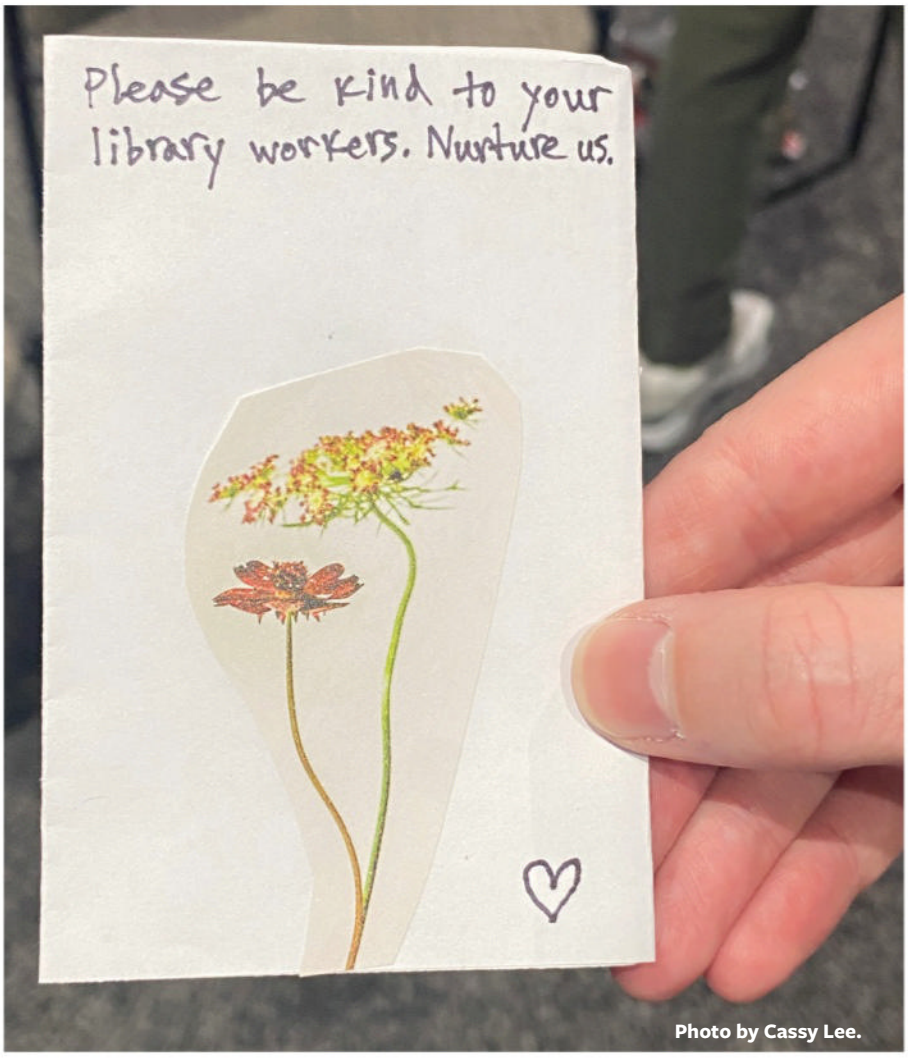


Photo by Cassy Lee.

Page 2: - Body map - Draw a basic outline of yourself and label what librarianship requires of you inside and out (i.e., a curious mind, lots of coffee, etc), or parts of you that are ailing and/or thriving as a library worker.
Page 3: *I feel a sense of well-being in the library when . . .*
Page 4: *Some of the toughest things about being a library worker are . . .*
Page 5: *I take care of myself by . . .*
Page 6: *I am setting an intention to take better care of myself by . . .*
Page 7: *I'd like to thank my mind and body for . . .* Or *I am grateful for . . .*
Page 8 (back cover): What would you like to tell others about what you need as a library worker?

I then shared a collection of graphic novels and zines with a wide range of styles on the table for people to look through for inspiration. I emphasized this was not about making a perfect product but rather about expressing feelings and communicating experiences. Since many people who don't identify as artists may freeze up when asked to make something that feels like "Art," I made sure there were examples with very simple styles and some with mostly text and minimal images. I also provided an abundance of magazines for collage. I encouraged participants to share what they made at the end but assured them that this was first and foremost an opportunity for them to practice some self-care on this busy conference day, and that if it was too personal, they could keep it private.

Those who were willing to share to a wider audience were encouraged to make a photocopy to add to the Zine Pavilion exhibit collection.

Sharing & Reflection

About 10 participants stayed to make zines. Because it was in the middle of a busy conference exhibit hall, many folks made their zines and left at different times, so there wasn't a group share-out, but many of them spoke to each other while they worked, and most of them showed me what they made. The ones who shared really appreciated the chance to pause and reflect on their experiences and expressed appreciation for a session focused on their well-being rather than just on professional development.

Some of the imagery created was really powerful. A college student who works in a library was there considering librarianship as a career and drew themselves deciding if this was the path for them. Another library worker drew a deeply personal piece about their journey to sobriety and some of the difficult triggers they were experiencing there at the conference. One middle-school librarian enjoyed reflecting on their advocacy for tweens and teens, especially the most vulnerable, and drew caring hands holding each other saying, "We got you." The image that stood out to me most was a collaged flower and heart with the message, "Please be kind to your library workers. Nurture us." It was a wonderful reminder that while we are so often the nurturers, we need nurturing as well.

The simple act of making something with their hands provided a therapeutic outlet for participants. Several attendees expressed excitement about implementing graphic medicine zine workshops at their own libraries. Given the personal nature of stories of illness and health, it's important that when planning a graphic medicine program to ask for support from mental health providers at your institution. For events in my school library that have dealt with sensitive issues, I have requested the school counselors to be available for any counseling needs that may arise or to provide related resources for participants. You might also partner with them in facilitating the event, as they could lead some grounding or mindfulness exercises at the beginning or end or facilitate a discussion or closing practice.

Photo by Cassy Lee.

One idea I would like to try in future iterations is to provide a one-sheet template with the prompts already on it, since for some, a blank page can be a barrier. Sarah Shay Mirk, a prolific zinester, makes an end-of-year mini-zine template every year (freely available on her website: https://www.mirkwork.com/). I asked her if I could translate it into Mandarin for a recent event and printed out both the Mandarin and English versions, pre-folded them, and encouraged attendees to stop and make one for free. Over 60 people of all ages stopped and participated!

I have also held zine workshops in which participants make up the prompts together. This takes more time and facilitation but may create more buy-in for your specific group, since they have a hand in the creation of the template. This could be an optional activity at a library professional development day, or there could be a make-and-take station in the staff room. If participants opt to share what they make, you can create a collection that lives in the staff room or even in the library to share these deeply humanizing experiences with the public and advocate for what library workers need.

Zines offer a low-barrier, high-impact way to foster self-expression, process emotions, and build community. Whether as a personal self-care practice or a programming idea for your library team or your patrons, libraries should incorporate graphic medicine zine-making into their wellness initiatives. Try it out, and see how storytelling and art can promote self-care, empathy, and health literacy in your library!

Cassy Lee has spent her career at the intersection of art, books, and education as an art teacher, a librarian, and an artist. She is working on her MFA in Comics at the California College of the Arts, exploring visual narrative as a means to heal while working on a graphic novel memoir. You can see her work at cassylee.com and follow her journey on Instagram or Substack (https://substack.com/@readfreedrawfree).

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-HAMISH STEELE
2025

The New Underground

By Olivia Radbill

From *Putty Pygmalion*, by Lonnie Garcia.

The infamous underground comix scene of the 1960s and ’70s is often heralded as the pinnacle of cartoonist counterculture. Underground comix—strategically spelled with a signifying *X*—are traditionally notable for their subversion of hegemonic American views surrounding sex, violence, and drug use. The intent behind many popular works appearing during this time was to idealize humor and vulgarity while flagrantly disregarding the Comics Code Authority (CCA), a now-defunct, private body established to censor obscenity in comics.

Since the age of underground comix, no other term has adequately captured the particular aesthetics and tone of the movement. “Indie comics,” or independent comics, are defined as all comics simply *not* published by major comic publishing houses. “Alt comix/comics,” or alternative comics, are vaguely defined as any comics not mainstream in content. Not quite indie and not quite alt, underground comix derive from a specific set of thematic principles including, free love, recreational drug use, and free-speech absolutism. Sex, drugs, and rock ’n’ roll notwithstanding, the original underground comix movement is one of sweeping influence over social satire, anti-capitalism, and anti-censorship in modern literature.

Of course, despite these ideals, in practice the underground comix scene was often fraught with racism, misogyny, and homophobia. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, many creators of marginalized identities found their creative outlet in the underground comix scene. From the underground movement came *Come Out Comix*, by Mary Wings, the first documented comic book about lesbianism created by a lesbian. Grass Green, one of the few Black creators in the movement, used the medium to highlight white American racism. Finally, iconic underground movement alum Art Spiegelman created a comic strip addressing his father’s survival of the Holocaust as a Polish Jew. This strip later became *Maus*, a revered work of Jewish writing.

While the underground comix movement may not exist exactly as it once did, there are many current creators whose work hearkens back to that of the original movement. These creators are radical and independent, often satirizing and exploring Western culture, queer identity, and politics through unique, often surreal visual style. With the founding tenets of the underground comix movement in mind, let’s take a look at the creators currently reimagining radicalism in comics.

Boy Island. By Leo Fox. Art by the author. 2024. Silver Sprocket, $29.99 (9798886200508).

Boy Island is a trans fable following the journey of Lucille, an inhabitant of Girl Island. Lucille seeks refuge from body dysmorphia on Boy Island. Transmasc creator Fox depicts this story through a heavily shaded palette, emphasizing the foreboding nature of the voyage. By way of

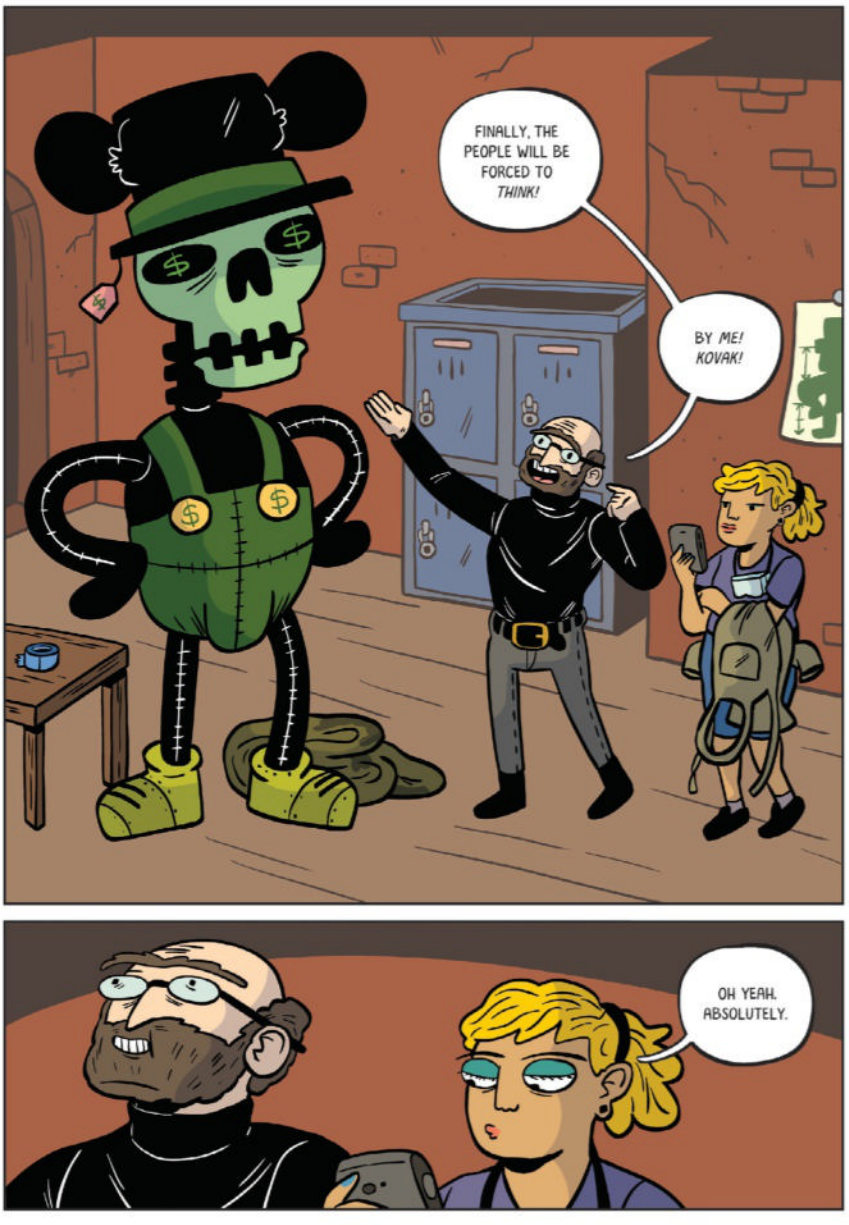
a memory-eating ferryman, Lucille begins their transition. *Boy Island* is a harrowing tale with art reminiscent of that by underground legend Vaughn Bodē.

Boys Weekend. By Mattie Lubchansky. Art by the author. 2023. Pantheon, $28 (9780593316719).

Boys Weekend is a horror story set in perhaps the most horrific of spaces: a bros-only bachelor weekend. Sammie, newly out as trans, participates in this trip out of a sense of obligation, despite their better judgement. Though Sammie struggles to navigate the cis-het group, it is the cult, the sea monsters, the human dismemberment, and the oppression of an unregulated market that are the immediate adversaries. Is it late-stage capitalism or transmisogyny? Lubchansky asks the reader the real question: Aren't they kind of the same thing?

Feast of Grease. By Chris Cilla. Art by the author. 2024. Floating World, $24.99 (9781963314038).

Psychedelic comix creator Cilla's *Feast of Grease* is probably the work most spiritually and tonally connected to underground comix movement on this list. *Feast of Grease* is a curated compilation of Cilla's work. Rife with silly imagery, a sense of malaise, some truly heartfelt pieces, and junkyard poetry, *Feast of Grease* is an odious joyride through the modern underground. This is a great place to start for those ready to dive headfirst into the scene.



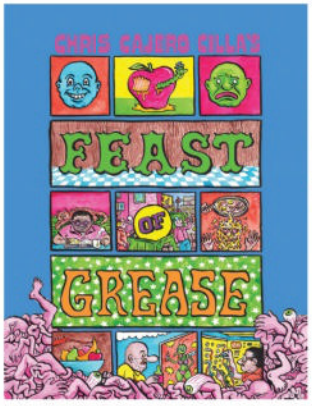
From *Boys Weekend*, written and drawn by Mattie Lubchansky.

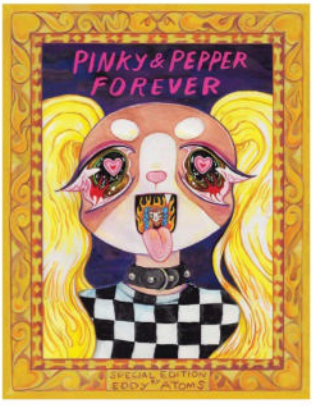
Girl Juice. By Benji Nate. Art by the author. 2023. Drawn & Quarterly, $24.95 (9781770466630)

In the same vein as *Wimmen's Comix*, the classic underground feminist anthology series, *Girl Juice* offers fun, frank depictions of female joy, friendship, and sexuality. The Girl Juice House is home to a raucous group of four young women as they navigate their twenties. Accompanying the playful, jokey nature of each strip is some sharp commentary on the role and depictions of modern women in a capitalist society that deals in youth and sex. Read with awe as the gang exorcises a demon that feeds off of attention-seeking behavior, swaps secrets, and horrifies churchgoers! *Girl Juice* is a fourth-wave-feminist-laden radical comic for the girls.

Magical Beatdown v.1. By Jenn Woodall. Art by the author. 2019. Silver Sprocket, $6 (9781945509315).

Parody is one of the most common tools used by the underground comix artist. Though, since the release of *Magical Beatdown*, Woodall has gone on to publish the more mainstream YA sf graphic novel *Space Trash* (2022), her earlier offerings are evocative of the parody work of underground creators. *Magical Beatdown* is a hyper-violent, expletive-laden Sailor Moon sendup with quick dialogue and an incredible fight sequence. In the words of one fictitious street prowler, "Oh fuck, not another magical girl."





Michael Mouse. By Mitch Lohmeier. Art by the author. 2023. Floating World, $12 (9781942801504).

In 1972, Robert Armstrong and Chester C. Crill published a grimy parody of Disney's classic Mickey Mouse character titled *Mickey Rat*. *Mickey Rat* was a litmus test to see how far parody could be taken. Not close enough to Disney's character design to get sued yet close enough to be easily associated, Mickey Rat was a lecherous proxy. The comic is filled with drug-use, racist caricatures, and sexual taboo. Half a century later, a new Mickey Mouse parody comic has arrived. Michael Mouse is a drug-dealing, dogfighting mobster. Yet, unlike Armstrong's comic, Lohmeier's work has a heart: David Duck, a man (duck) determined to provide for his family while dealing with addiction issues. Maybe, in the wake of the internet, shock has less value. Originally serialized on Instagram, *Michael Mouse* is one of the best parody works in comics today.

No Romance in Hell. By Hyena Hell. Art by the author. 2020. Silver Sprocket, $5 (9781945509476).

No Romance in Hell follows an Amazonian demon's ascent to Earth in search of a male partner. Unfortunately, men on Earth turn out to be just as disappointing as men in Hell. Much like the work of second-wave feminists of the underground movement, *No Romance in Hell* is a fun, rowdy romp. Watch as our heroine decimates potential romantic partners with laser eyes, attempts app dating, and decries romantic love. With a name like Hyena Hell, you already know this creator will pull no punches.

Paroxysm v.1: An Independent Horror Anthology. Ed. by Natalia Lopes. 2019. Mysto, $25.

Falling somewhere between underground comix culture and zine culture is *Paroxysm v.1: An Independent Horror Anthology*, a work released by independent micro-publisher Mysto Press. The volume contains a medley of prose, poetry, art, and comics. This and the following volumes in the series hearken back to the DIY nature of underground comix. *Paroxysm* was compiled with the intent of highlighting underrepresented voices in horror. This particular volume contains two sequential art pieces, one by Natalia Lopes and another by Sarah Van Rose. While Lopes' comic, about a gay vampire, is a successful exercise in queer body horror, Van Rose's comic juxtaposes existential dread and social isolation. Though differing in style and substance, the pieces are complementary works in a collection that is a clear labor of love by Lopes. If you're looking for fully independent horror creators to support, start here.

The Pervert. By Michelle Perez. Art by Remy Boydell. 2018. Image Comics, $17.99 (9781534307414).

This unflinching, yet heartfelt look at sex work from the perspective of a trans sex worker is told through a series of vignettes following Felina, an animal-like yet anthropomorphic transfemme millennial, as she deals with depression, survival sex, and the complexity of the sex worker-client relationship. In the tradition of the autobiographical underground creators like Carol Tyler, *The Pervert* is unwaveringly honest.

Pinky & Pepper Forever: Special Edition. By Eddy Atoms. Art by the author. 2025. Silver Sprocket, $19.99 (9798886200348).

Comic artist Atoms' *Pinky & Pepper Forever: Special Edition* (2025) is a fun, audacious entry point into modern underground comix. Two anthropomorphic lesbian dogs, stylized after a little-known line of Bratz dolls, travel to hell in succession after Pinky's suicide during a performance-art piece. Part Catholic guilt, part lighthearted parody of the art world, *Pinky & Pepper Forever* is a work that perfectly encapsulates the absurdism and medium experimentation of the underground movement.

Putty Pygmalion. By Lonnie Garcia. Art by the author. 2024. Silver Sprocket $15.99 (9798886200423).

A radish named Darryl uses a now-outlawed children's putty product to create the perfect boyfriend, Peter. When putty-based Peter sneaks out one night and parties with Darryl's friends, Darryl must confront the fact that maybe *he* is the problem. Using a mixed-media approach, Garcia makes a comic that looks like its foundation lies in the ethers of an Xanga blog. It's weird, it's funny, it's kind of ugly. It's for fans of Jane Schoenbrun's *I Saw the TV Glow* (2024).

Olivia Radbill is the Adult Services/Local History Librarian at the South Pasadena Public Library and an Adjunct Instructor for the Louisiana State University School of Information Studies (SIS). She is also the founder and chair of the California Library Association (CLA) Graphic Novels & Comics Interest Group.

From Webcomics to Print, and Vice Versa

By Melanie C. Duncan

From *Solo Leveling*, by Chugong, art by DUBU, and translated by J. Torres and Hye Young Im.

In recent years, webcomics have gained popularity through the easy availability of titles on apps like WEBTOON and Tapas. Many titles that started on webcomics platforms have subsequently gone on to print and anime fame. The crossover series that go from serialized webcomics to print titles (and vice versa) are in high demand in libraries, and with more series being adapted into anime, these titles provide an easy way for fans from the previously disparate formats to find a common ground for discussion and enjoyment.

Webcomics are popular for many reasons, primarily because they are easily accessible on the global market. The serialized format is similar to traditional monthly comic books, although instead of reading from front to back (or back to front), they are read in a scrolling format from top to bottom. This digital format offers more mobility than the traditional formats, and interactive options added to some titles add depth and interest with soundtracks, Q&As with the authors and artists, and intense discussion in the comments section and on social media. The ability for popular artists from other outlets, such as K-pop stars, to collaborate on webcomics pulls in new and established fans from different media.

There are innumerable genres represented, and readers of all ages and interests can find a webcomic that appeals to them. Some of the most popular genres are isekai, involving a person who is transported to another world and must figure out how to survive; historical settings featuring Chinese, Japanese, or Korean royal courts, intrigue, and romance; and modern romance featuring hidden identities, office romances, and secret fortunes. Other genres are slice-of-life, horror, action, drama, fantasy, mystery, and science fiction.

Why should libraries acquire webcomics as part of their already popular manga/manhwa collections? The number one reason is interest. The popularity of Alice Oseman's Heartstopper series and Rachel Smythe's Lore Olympus series speaks to this. Webcomics readers are voraciously seeking new content to read and explore. Webcomics also tend to update frequently (unless a popular title goes on a dreaded hiatus), and fans who read the free, web-based option love to get their hands on the print version for multiple rereads.

Here are a few webcomics and their print counterparts that will fit in many comics collections.

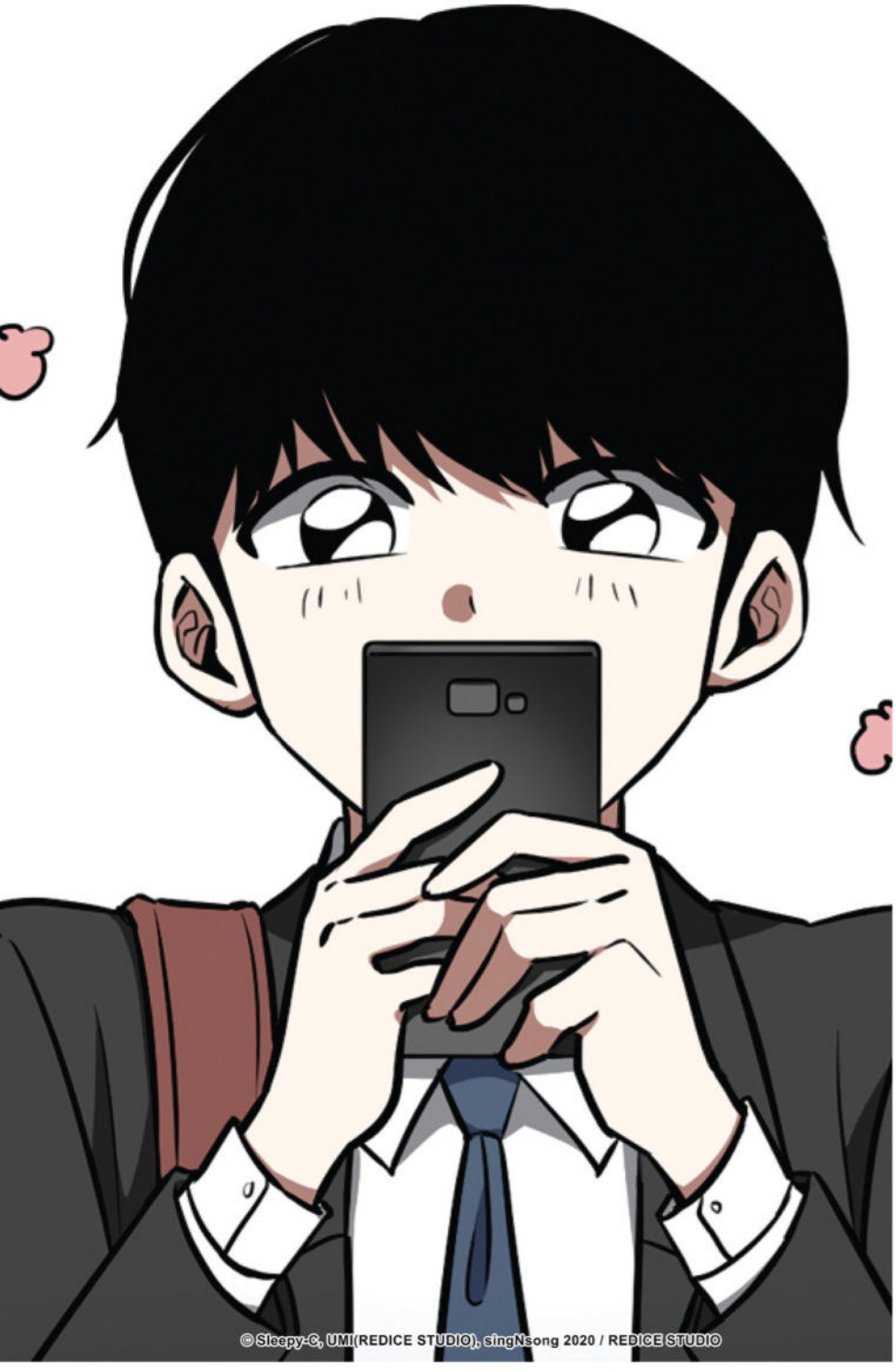
The Beginning After the End, v.1. By TurtleMe. Art by Fuyuki23. 2022. Yen, $20 (9781975345631). Also available on Tapas.

When Arthur Leywin reincarnates as a baby in another world, he remembers his abilities from his previous life and works to regain his strength to protect his new family from the evils rampant around them. The webcomic is based on the light novel series of the same name and is currently up to seven volumes. An animated series released in April 2025.

Castle Swimmer, v.1. By Wendy Martin. Art by the author. 2024. Ten Speed, $18.99 (9780593835821). Also available on WEBTOON.

Young Kappa is the Beacon, a mythical being revered by the ocean residents as the person who will grant their wishes. However, no one has trained Kappa on what being the

From *Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint, v.1,* by singNsong, art by Sleepy-C, and translated by J. Torres and Hye Young Im.



Beacon means, and so far, it seems to bring him more bad luck and loneliness than anything else. When he meets Siren, the prince of the Sharks, Kappa finds someone who balances him, but his position as Beacon may tear them apart. A second volume was released in 2025.

Clean Sweep the Graphic Novel, v.1. By Ilona Andrews. Art by Shinju Ageha. 2024. Andrews McMeel, $18.99 (9781524888688). Also available on Tapas.

Dina Demille comes from a family of Innkeepers with a capital "I." She maintains an Inn in a sleepy little Texas town which functions as a way station for intergalactic travelers. On her home ground, she's almost omnipotent, but something is after one of her guests, and it won't stop until it kills him. This first webcomic in the series differs slightly from the book due to the visual format but is a hit with fans.

Morgana and Oz, v.1. By Miyuli. 2024. Wattpad, $18.99 (9781998854837). Also available on WEBTOON.

Young witch Morgana's family is feuding with the local vampires. When she runs into one of them, Oz, outside her home, she panics and casts a spell that transforms him. While she works to change Oz back, they grow closer as they talk, but will they be able to stay friends after he's a vampire again? This sweet, *Romeo and Juliet*–vibing webcomic has a third volume due in September 2025, in addition to a coloring book and an art book showing how to draw the characters.

Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint, v.1. By singNsong. Art by Sleepy-C. Tr. by J. Torres and Hye Young Im. 2023. Ize, $20 (9798400901065). Also available on WEBTOON.

Office worker Dokja Kim reads the last chapter of a serialized web novel on his way home from work and suddenly finds himself living the story as

the world goes crazy around him. As the only person who read the story to the end, he may be humanity's only savior—if the true main character doesn't kill him first. The webcomic is up to six volumes and is based on the light novels of the same name, with a K-drama in production and an anime in the works for Crunchyroll.

Solo Leveling, v.1. By Chugong. Art by DUBU (REDICE Studio). Tr. by J. Torres and Hye Young Im. 2021. Ize, $20 (9781975319434). Also available on Tappytoon and Tapas.

Low-rank hunter Jinwoo Sung struggles to find work to pay the family's bills until an encounter in a dungeon with a powerful being changes his life. Volume 12 of the series was published in May 2025. The series has also spawned a popular anime series currently in season two, a K-drama in production, and a role-playing video game app.

True Beauty, v.1. By Yaongyi. 2022. Wattpad, $18.99 (9781990259890). Also available on WEBTOON.

Schoolgirl Jugyeong Lim is bullied for her appearance by family and classmates. In a desperate attempt to change her life, she studies video tutorials and learns how to expertly apply makeup, transforming herself from ugly duckling to popular swan. But how true is her beauty when she fears how others would react if she were ugly again? There are currently four volumes of the hit webcomic published, and a popular K-drama was produced.

Under the Oak Tree, v.1. By Suji Kim. Art by P. 2024. Inklore, $29.99 (9780593871287). Also available on Manta.

In this historical fantasy, Maximilian is forced by her father to marry a knight, Sir Riftan. Maxi's stuttering and Riftan's ignorance of her true upbringing as a servant lead to confusion and a rocky start to their relationship. A light novel has also been published, and volume two is expected in September 2025. This series has crossover appeal for romantasy readers.

Melanie C. Duncan is Head of Collections & Acquisitions for Middle Georgia Regional Library System, Macon (GA). She has reviewed hundreds of titles for *Library Journal* (Romance Reviewer of the Year, 2019), *Booklist*, and other publications, and served on YALSA's Great Graphic Novels for Teens Committee.

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VIZ

A Cat Manga for Every Reader

By Kacy Helwick

From *The Complete Chi's Sweet Home,* written and drawn by Konami Kanata.

Newer enthusiasts may be surprised by how many different types of stories can be found in the manga format. Name a theme, and it's likely you can find a manga series that fits it. One of my favorite examples is the wide variety of titles found within the genre of cat manga.

Full disclosure, I'm a dog person. But I can see the appeal of cats and why they've held an important role in people's homes as well as in popular culture. Cats can be cute, mysterious, cuddly, mean, lazy, energetic, loving, mischievous, and so much more. In Japan, cats have been symbols of good luck, legendary shape-shifting supernatural entities, and the epitome of kawaii, or "cute culture." Of course, an animal with such varied attributes could be the star of a large range of stories that cross many genres, and there are cat mangas for many different types of readers.

For fans of all things cute

The Complete Chi's Sweet Home, part 1. By Konami Kanata. Art by the author. 2015. Vertical, $24.95 (9781942993162). Gr. 4 and up.

A flipped (reading left to right) omnibus edition of the classic cute cat title. When a kitten gets separated from her family, she's taken in by the Yamadas, who live in an apartment with a no-pet policy.

For fans of art & magical realism

Cats of the Louvre. By Taiyo Matsumoto. Art by the author. 2019. Viz, $32 (978197470789). Gr. 4 and up.

A Louvre tour guide and new night watchman are brought into the secret world of the cats that live in the attic of the famous museum by the old watchman whose sister disappeared into a painting 50 years ago.

For fans of isekai and stories that subvert fantasy tropes

A Cat from Our World and the Forgotten Witch, v.1. By Hiro Kashiwaba. Art by the author. 2024. Seven Seas, $13.99 (9798888432594). Gr. 8–11.

After being struck by a car, a cat wakes up in a fantasy world as a giant, accidentally summoned by a once-heroic witch who is now shunned by the townspeople and expects the cat to listen to her orders and savor the food her old beast enjoyed, like tails of swamp slugs.

For gamers

Cat + Gamer, v.1. By Wataru Nadatani. Art by the author. 2022. Dark Horse, $11.99 (9781506727417). Gr. 8–12.

Loner Riku dedicates all of her personal time to gaming and surprises everyone—including herself—by adopting a stray kitten that was found in her work's parking lot. She's a clueless noob when it comes to pets, but rises to the challenge of taking care of her new companion.

For goths

Creepy Cat, v.1. By Cotton Valent. Art by the author. 2021. Seven Seas, $14.99 (9781648277870). Gr. 5–8.

In this funny, episodic series, Flora inherits a dark gothic mansion from a distant relative and quickly finds she isn't living there alone. There's a creepy cat who can do all sorts of creepy things, and Flora quickly learns to deal with living with such a strange creature.

For Junji Ito completists

Junji Ito's Cat Diary: Yon & Mu. By Junji Ito. Art by the author. 2021. Kodansha, $24.99 (9781646512515). Gr. 8–11.

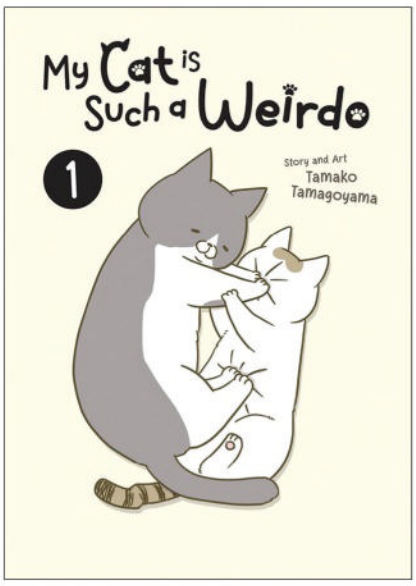
Collector's edition of the comedic memoir of the legendary horror mangaka becoming a cat owner and falling for feline charms, despite his cat Yon's cursed face and skull-like markings.

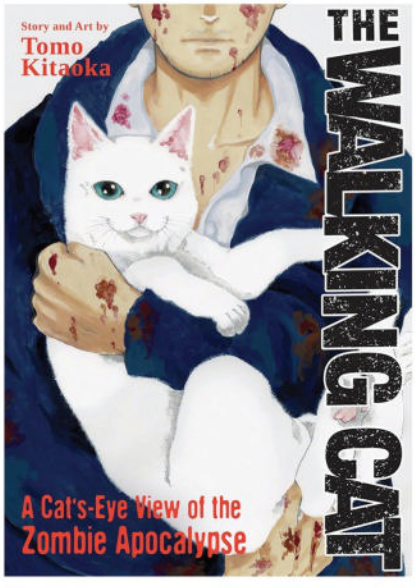
For readers looking for a gentle, slice-of-life story

A Man and His Cat, v.1. By Umi Sakurai. Art by the author. 2020. Square Enix, $14.99 (9781646090266). Gr. 5–8.

Fukumaru, an adult cat purchased from the pet store after being passed over for nearly a year for being ugly, narrates this tale. His man, a widower with adult children, proves to be the perfect companion.

From *Cat + Gamer*, written and drawn by Wataru Nadatani.





For readers looking for realistic & funny vignettes

My Cat Is Such a Weirdo, v.1. By Tamako Tamagoyama. Art by the author. 2023. Seven Seas, $15 (9798888432082). Gr. 4 and up.

The mangaka based this series on the real-life antics of her two rescue cats and includes real photos of her pets in many of the short comics sidebars.

For readers of the Warriors series and friendship & survival stories

Cat Companions Maruru and Hachi, v.1. By Yuri Sonoda. Art by the author. 2024. Seven Seas, $14.99 (9798891602182). Gr. 5–8.

Maruru, a lost pet cat, and Hachi, a street-smart stray cat, become companions after an initial clash. Together, they face a rival cat gang, winter snowstorms, and Yasuo the cat-napper, who catches strays to be spayed and neutered.

For readers who like bad boys with soft sides

Ex-Yakuza and Stray Kitten, v.1. By Riddle Kamimura. Art by the author. 2022. Seven Seas, $13.99 (9781638585893). Gr. 8–11.

A stray kitten is taken in off the streets on a cold rainy night by a menacing ex-gangster. The kitten keeps waiting for the scary-looking man to do something sinister to him, and keeps getting surprised as he gets warm baths and good food instead.

For readers who like to root for the villains

The Evil Secret Society of Cats, v.1. By PANDANIA. Art by the author. 2020. Seven Seas, $14.99 (9781638585879). Gr. 5–8.

They are the evil secret society of cats and their goal is to teach humans to fear the feline race by using such tactics as being so cute they make humans late, blocking their sources of information by sitting in front of the television, and taking over all the space in their photo galleries.

For readers who need to relax

Cat Massage Therapy, v.1. By Haru Hisakawa. Art by the author. 2021. Seven Seas, $14.99 (9781648276569). Gr. 4 and up.

A sore, burnt-out office worker discovers a massage parlor run by cats. He and his whole office learn how to take better care of themselves from the cat manager and the kitten trainees.

For zombie enthusiasts

Night of the Living Cat, v.1. By Hawkman. Art by Mecha-Roots. 2022. Seven Seas, $13.99 (9781638585817). Gr. 8–11.

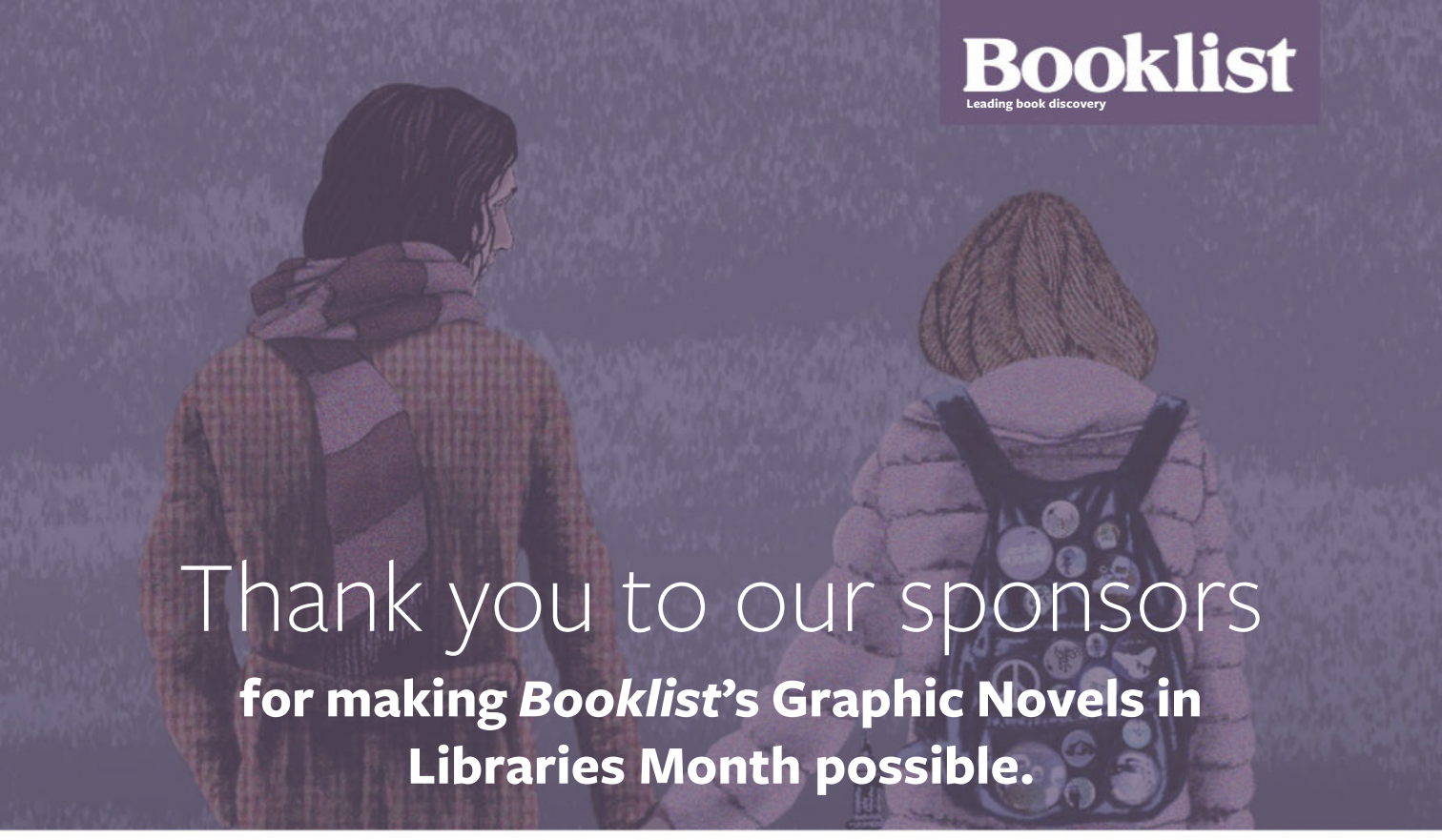
There is a virus that spreads by contact, turning humans into cats. Few humans remain and survivors try to keep out of reach of the adorable but menacing horde. Our mysterious protagonist is a man who can't remember his past, but does know a lot about cats and hopes to live to see a cure and be able to safely cuddle them again.

The Walking Cat: A Cat's-Eye-View of the Zombie Apocalypse, omnibus edition. By Tomo Kitaoka. Art by the author. 2021. Seven Seas, $24.99 (9781648276118). Gr. 10–12.

A cat named Yuki becomes a valued companion—and motivation to keep living—to various humans as they try to survive the zombie apocalypse.

If this isn't enough cat manga for your readers, there are even more titles to read and recommend. Konami Kanata has a new ongoing series, Sue and Tai-chan. PANDANIA has multiple series, including Yokai Cats and Monster Cats. And there are so many important cat sidekicks in manga of various genres, like *Bounce Back,* by Misako Rocks! Add these to your collections, and you'll find they have more than nine lives.

Kacy Helwick is the Youth Collection Development Librarian for the New Orleans Public Library.



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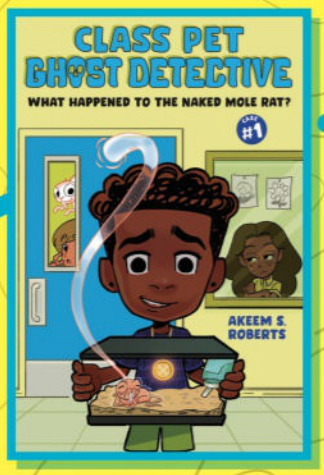

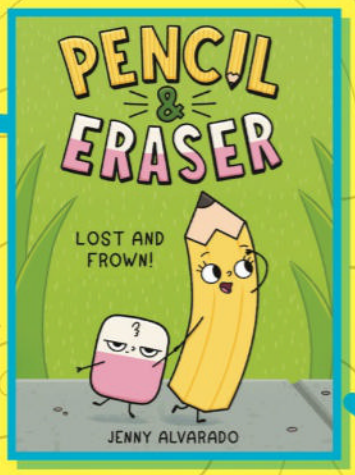

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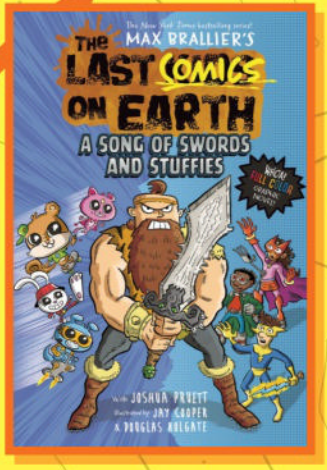
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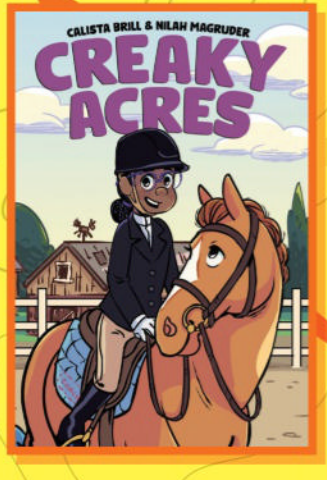

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